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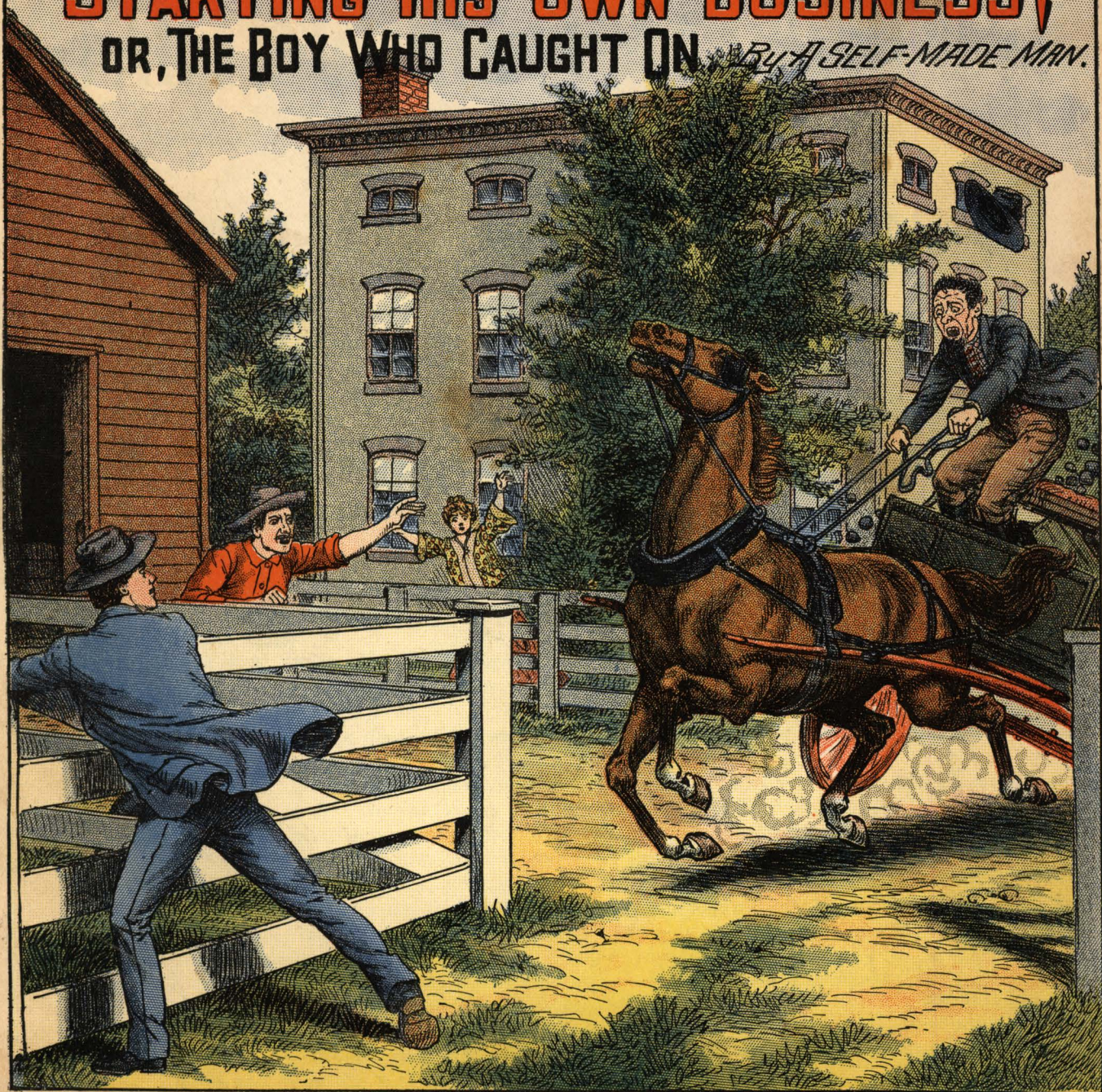
5 CENTS.

**FORTUNE WEEKLY**

**STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.**

**STARTING HIS OWN BUSINESS;**

**OR, THE BOY WHO CAUGHT ON** *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



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# ame and Fortune Weekly

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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# STARTING HIS OWN BUSINESS

OR,

## THE BOY WHO CAUGHT ON

By A SELF-MADE MAN

### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCES TOM SHERIDAN AND HIS SURROUNDINGS.

"Where are you bound, Tom?" asked Bob Pennington.

"After the doctor."

"For your aunt?"

"Yes. She's very bad. I'm afraid she's going to die," said Tom Sheridan, gulping back a lump in his throat, while his eyes filled with tears.

"Too bad," replied Bob. "I'm dead sorry for her. She's had a pretty hard time of it for some time back, ever since——"

And then he stopped and kicked a dent in the country road.

"I know what you mean, Bob," said Tom, solemnly. "She has had a hard time of it. No one knows that better than me. I've tried to make things as easy for her as I could; but Mr. Bagley has simply acted like a brute all along. He's down at the Corners, now, getting his usual jag on, I guess, though where he gets the money to fill up on is a mystery to me. When she's gone he'll go to the dogs, not but that he's pretty near there now."

"You'll pull out, I suppose," said Bob.

"There's nothing else for me to do. I'd have gone away from here long ago, only for aunt. I wouldn't leave her to the mercy of that hog not for a million dollars."

"You've done the square thing by her, Tom."

"I've tried to. She was my father's sister, and was always good to me. I don't like to lose her, but she'll be happier away from this life."

Tom leaned his arm on the rail fence and hid his face in the folds of his jacket.

He felt very badly, indeed, and his friend respected his feelings.

"Well," he said, pulling himself together, "what's the use of kicking against fate? Are you coming my way?"

"I'm going to the village."

"Come on, then."

Half a mile down the road the boys parted, Tom entering the gateway before a neat-looking cottage where Dr. Kent lived.

The physician had just returned from visiting a patient, and his buggy stood in the back yard waiting for the hired man to take the horse out.

The order to do so was countermanded, and Tom and the doctor were soon driving up the road toward the miserable dwelling, where the lad lived with his aunt, Mrs. Sarah Bagley, and her shiftless husband.

Once on a time that wretched habitation had been a neat and comfortable cottage, with a good piece of ground for vegetables and fruit trees, the whole surrounded by a white picket fence.

There had also been a hen-house, and pig-styes, and a small barn.

All this, however, was altered now.

The garden and small orchard had run wild with weeds.

The pigs and poultry, and cow, had been sold, while the hen-house, pig-styes, and part of the barn had been pulled down for fuel.

Ten years since that desolate place had been the well-



furnished, comfortable home of William Bagley and his contented wife, Sarah.

He was a carpenter and builder and had plenty of work.

He owned the cottage and ground, and was considered fairly prosperous.

He had a little money saved, and he hoped one day to add a neighboring bit of property to his possessions.

The owner of the property died suddenly, and the opportunity was offered to him to get the place cheap for cash.

But he didn't have the cash, and he hated to mortgage his own little property.

While he was considering the matter he discovered that a well-to-do farmer on the other side, a man whom he hated, was after the property, too.

He was in a quandary, for he didn't want Farmer Whipple to get it.

However, he had the advantage of the first chance.

Unfortunately, at this juncture a reckless acquaintance of earlier years turned up.

He had just come out of prison, but kept that fact to himself.

He learned how Bagley was fixed, and taking advantage of his old weakness for liquor, which he had, to a certain extent conquered, got him intoxicated one night, and persuaded him to take part in an enterprise which promised considerable monetary results.

It was nothing more nor less than the robbery of Farmer Whipple's home.

Bagley's friend, Tom Johnson, had sent a note to the farmer, telling him that his uncle, a wealthy farmer in the next county, was dying, and that Whipple and his wife must come there at once.

Johnson calculated that this would leave the house at his mercy.

The scheme would probably have succeeded only it happened that the uncle in question had set out to make a visit to his nephew, and the two parties came together on the road.

Farmer Whipple was much astonished to meet the man in good health he supposed to be dying.

Perhaps he was also disappointed, for he yearned for his uncle's money.

Explanations ensued, and these gave Whipple a strong suspicion that something was wrong.

The combined party hurried back to the Whipple farm, arriving just in time to capture Johnson, and the intoxicated Bagley, red-handed.

Both were tried and sent to the penitentiary for five years.

When Bagley got out he was a changed man.

His return to the village was eyed with suspicion.

His wife, who had borne up as well as she could under the disgrace, had managed to get along after a fashion.

She was the only one who gave him a welcome when he came back, the only one who stood his friend, and a poor return she got for it.

He made no attempt to go to work; in fact, nobody wished to employ him, and the first thing he did was to mortgage his home.

With the money, he sought the questionable society at the Corners, and commenced the downward path.

About this time, Tom Sheridan, a bright and trious lad, came to live with the Bagleys.

Tom was an orphan, and Mrs. Bagley was his father's only sister.

The boy soon saw how things were going, and as grew older he remonstrated with Mr. Bagley, who drove him away from the cottage.

He went to work for Farmer Pennington and with him about a year.

Then his aunt was stricken with a lingering illness. Tom went back to the cottage to do what he could for her, for nobody else would stay with her on account of her husband, who had got pretty low by this time.

Several times she had seemed at the point of death, but had pulled through.

Tom was her only consolation and support, and he nobly responded.

On the day our story opens she had been taken with one of her sinking spells, and from the way she looked Tom was afraid that she wouldn't get over it.

The only thing he could do was to go for the doctor.

When they reached the cottage Mrs. Bagley seemed to be better.

The doctor's experienced eye saw that she could not live long—not many hours at the most—and after he had done what he could for her he took Tom aside and told him what he might expect.

The boy was shocked and upset, though he had practically expected it.

He smothered his grief as best he could and sat down by his aunt's bedside to stick to her to the last.

Night found him still there.

He made no attempt to get any supper for himself, as he had no heart to eat.

His aunt, who had been in a semi-conscious state for some time, came to herself about nine o'clock.

"Tom, I am going to die," she said, in a weak voice. "I feel it here," putting her hand on her heart. "I shan't live till morning. Where is William, my husband? Hasn't he come home yet?"

"No, aunt. He doesn't usually get back till after midnight."

"I must see him, Tom. I must see him before I die," she cried, feverishly.

"You'll see him all right," he replied, reassuringly.

"But I must see him now. He's at the Corners. You'll go for him, Tom, and bring him to me, won't you?" she begged, earnestly.

"There is no one to stop with you if I go, aunt."

"No matter. I shall wait for nothing. Do go at once and bring him home. I want to see him before I die."

She was so insistent that Tom felt that he must oblige her.

So he kissed her tenderly and departed on his errand. He made all haste to reach the Corners.

This was the junction of three roads, two miles outside the village.

It consisted of a blacksmith shop, a small, general store, several scattered houses and a roadhouse.

The latter carried on a thriving business, especially in the barroom.



After raising a storm to be seen there at all hours of the day his wife was indeed night.

That quieted him one of all was William Bagley, who, in as if he was sorry, five years, had spent several hundred dollars

Tom relented breakfast. He had to be a profitable customer, but because

Soon after eating in a way, he was tolerated and furnished he had gone to find he couldn't pay for it.

He turned up, wanted to find Bagley he would have gone such a quarrelsome of the roadhouse, and that is where the boy

He was easily as he could go.

were glad to have been in the place before, and he hated

Next day that forced him to go there that night; but corner of his no help for it.

Remained so place was dim with tobacco smoke, and at first in company not able to see the object of his errand.

After length he saw him at a table with three other men, drinking, talking and smoking, as if life held no better employment.

He walked straight up to his aunt's husband and tapped him on the shoulder.

The man turned his inflamed countenance toward him and recognized him.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "What do you want? How's the old woman?"

The indifferent and insulting way the words were spoken made Tom's blood boil with indignation.

It would probably have afforded him a certain satisfaction to have struck Mr. Bagley to the floor.

But he did not dare show his anger under the circumstances.

"Aunt Sarah is dying," he said, huskily. "She wants to see you, and sent me to fetch you."

"Oh, she did?" snarled Bagley, who was in a quarrelsome humor. "She sent you to fetch me. You go back and tell her I'll come when I get good and ready."

"But she wants to see you now."

"What do I care what she wants?" he cried, with an imprecation. "Do you s'pose I'm goin' to leave my friends just to oblige her? Not by a jugfull."

"If you don't come you may never see her alive again," persisted Tom.

"Well, I'm not worryin' about her dyin'," replied Bagley, heartlessly. "She's been dyin' several times, but I notice she didn't turn up her toes, just the same. Now just go back and mind your own business, d'ye understand? Maybe you're dry and would like a drink, first. There's the bottle—help yourself."

"I wouldn't touch the vile stuff," answered the boy, with much spirit.

"You wouldn't, eh?" cried Bagley, with a wicked grin. "I've a great mind to make you, you sanctimonious little monkey! What say? Shall we pour some down his throat?" he added, turning toward his associates, and at the same time grabbing Tom by the sleeve of his jacket.

"You won't pour any down my throat, Mr. Bagley," he said, resolutely.

"Oh, I won't? We'll see whether I won't."

He attempted to seize Tom around the waist, but the muscular boy shook him off.

One of the other men, however, caught him by the arm,

while Bagley, catching up the bottle, labelled whiskey, staggered on his feet.

Tom, realizing that he was in an embarrassing position, started to get out of it without regard to consequences.

Failing to disengage his arm he struck at the man who held him.

Swat!

The blow reached the fellow's jaw and he fell against Bagley.

The latter lost his uncertain balance and both men fell together.

The bottle was smashed against the table.

Bagley held on to the jagged end and, as his hand swung around, he struck his companion a glancing blow, cutting open his cheek.

The wounded man, bleeding like a pig, jumped on Bagley and began to pound him.

Tom made use of his chance to leave the barroom in a hurry.

## CHAPTER II.

### TOM IS THROWN ON HIS OWN RESOURCES.

Tom started for the cottage, conscious that his errand had been fruitless.

He saw that there was little chance of Mr. Bagley appearing at his dying wife's bedside for some hours, and he did not know what kind of report to make to his aunt, who he knew was feverishly anxious to see her husband.

His feelings toward Bagley, never of a pleasant character, were now decidedly aggressive.

He blamed him for all the misery that had befallen his father's sister for the past nine years, and especially for his treatment of her since he had returned from the penitentiary.

When he opened the back door and entered the kitchen, the very silence of the place struck a chill to the boy's heart.

A strange premonition that something had happened to his aunt during his short absence fell upon him like an ice-cold blanket.

He ascended the stairs to the bedroom on the floor above and softly entered.

His aunt lay on the bed, just as he had left her, the soft glow of the lamp shaded from her face, but to his sharp eye there was something about her that looked different even across the room.

He stopped and listened intently.

Not the faintest sound or movement came from the bed. With a great fear oppressing him, he crossed the room and looked down at her.

The dropped jaw and staring eye told their story.

His aunt was dead.

It was a terrible shock for Tom, and for some time he was quite overcome by grief, but at length he pulled himself together and proceeded to tie up her lower jaw and close her eyes, on which he put a couple of small pebbles that he found on a shelf.

After that he sat down to pass the night as a silent and mournful watcher.

About two in the morning he heard a voice in the road, singing discordantly.



"That's Mr. Bagley," he muttered, a hard look coming into his young face. "Well, I see his finish right here. The only friend he had in the world is gone. After this he'll have to carry his jags somewhere else. The lawyer who foreclosed the mortgage months ago, but who permitted us to live here because he didn't want to turn aunt out into the road, will now take possession of the property and turn it to some account."

The door banged downstairs as Bagley entered the kitchen.

In a moment or two Tom heard him staggering upstairs.

Finally he appeared in the doorway, clinging to the sides.

He was a picture for fair.

He had been badly handled in the scrap brought about by his ineffectual effort to force liquor on Tom, and his face looked as ugly as sin.

The boy, after one glance at it, scented trouble, and he steeled himself to meet it.

He was in a humor to stand no fooling from the dead woman's husband, and was plucky and strong enough to resist any aggression on the part of the drunken man.

Bagley gazed around the room before entering, and his eyes rested on the boy.

Then they began to twinkle with a tipsy fury, and rolling up his sleeve as he advanced, he made direct for Tom.

The lad got on his feet with a deliberation that showed he was prepared to meet the issue, whatever it might be, and his eyes flashed resentfully.

"Now, you little monkey, I've got you and I'm goin' to thrash you within an inch of your life!" snarled Bagley.

"You'd better not touch me, Mr. Bagley, if you know when you're well off," replied Tom. "I've taken all I'm going to from you. If you had the feelings of a mouse you'd respect the presence of the dead, but I don't imagine that you have any."

"Dead!" exclaimed Bagley, coming to a stop. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean your wife is dead. She died while I was over at the Corners trying to persuade you to come to her, as she begged me to do. But you wouldn't come. No, you preferred to stay with your cronies. Well, you'll have full swing after this to stay with them right along—if they'll let you. It's a long lane that hasn't a turning, and you've reached the turn of yours. I hope you'll enjoy the sensation."

Bagley turned from Tom and staggered to the bed.

"Dead!" he muttered. "I don't believe it. You're only shammin' to save that little villain from a lickin'. Wake up! Wake up! Or I'll pull you out of bed."

He grabbed the dead woman by the arm and shook her roughly.

"Let her alone, you brute!" flashed Tom, springing forward and pulling him away.

Bagley swung half around and crashed over a chair.

The shock sent the liquor fumes to his head.

He made one feeble effort to rise, and then rolled over, stupidly, and presently was snoring in a drunken sleep.

The boy regarded him with contempt.

"You're a fine specimen to call yourself a man, you are," he said. "If I wanted a warning to leave liquor alone I'd find it in you. You ought to be photographed as you are

now. The picture would make a fine right a temperance lecture."

Tom grabbed him by the arms and dragged him to the opposite side of the room where he had turned to his post.

He replaced the pebbles on his aunt's eyes, and as the rumpled bedclothes, and sat down to await the morning.

At length daylight dawned, and after waiting he started for the Pennington farm.

He found Bob just coming out in the yard, ill from his illness.

"Hello, Tom!" exclaimed his friend, in some surprise at seeing him so early. "What brings you here at this time of day? How's your aunt?"

"She's dead," replied Tom, sadly, but without a th, b

"Dead! My gracious, you don't say! When will she nobly die?"

"Last night. I would like you to come over and see me out a bit."

"Sure I will. We'll have breakfast in a little while. You'll eat with me, of course. I'll tell father I'm going over with you."

The Penningtons liked Tom, and they sympathized with him in his loss, though they believed that his aunt was far better off at rest.

Mrs. Pennington said that she and her girl would go to the cottage in a little while and wash and lay out the dead woman for burial.

Tom thanked her for the proposed kindness.

Mr. Pennington asked the boy if he needed any money for immediate expenses, and offered him a \$20 bill.

Tom accepted it gratefully, promising to repay it when he could.

He said that the furniture and personal property of his aunt ought to easily cover the expenses of her funeral.

If there was anything left over he intended to expend it on a tombstone.

"If Mr. Bagley interferes with me in any way, or asserts his right to the property necessary to bury my aunt, I'll swear out a warrant against him, and have him put in the lock-up as a vagrant," said Tom, resolutely.

"I would," replied Mr. Pennington. "What do you expect to do after the funeral, Tom?"

"Hustle for myself," replied the boy, promptly.

"I can give you something to do on the farm for awhile, and that will give you time to consider the future."

"Thank you, Mr. Pennington. I will accept your offer."

After breakfast Tom returned to the cottage with Bob. Bagley was still snoring away where Tom had left him during the night.

With Bob's help, Tom carried the man into a back room, laid him upon the bed he was accustomed to use since his habits had got so bad, and locked him in.

"Now he's out of the way," said Tom. "If you don't mind staying here on watch, Bob, I'll call on Mr. Mold, the undertaker."

Bob had no objection, and Tom departed on his errand.

He came back with Mr. Mold, and while the undertaker was performing his first duties with the dead, Bagley woke up, fairly sober, and finding himself locked inside the room, started to kick the door open.

Tom then let him out.



After raising a small ruction, Bagley discovered that his wife was indeed dead.

That quieted him down, and for a little while it looked as if he was sorry for his conduct toward the poor woman.

Tom relented toward him so far as to cook him some breakfast.

Soon after eating it he disappeared, and the boys guessed he had gone to the Corners to drown his feelings in liquor.

He turned up late that night, full, as usual, but not in such a quarrelsome mood.

He was easily persuaded to go to bed, and the watchers were glad to be relieved of his presence.

Next day Mrs. Sarah Bagley was buried in a sunny corner of the village churchyard, and her husband remained sober long enough to accompany the funeral party, in company with Tom, as chief mourner.

After the funeral Tom went over to the Pennington farmhouse, where for the next month he shared Bob's room and worked at odd jobs about the place.

In the meantime the contents of the cottage was sold at auction to liquidate the funeral and other expenses, and the property taken in hand by the owner, who proceeded to put it into shape for a tenant.

Bagley, being thrown out on the charity of an unsympathetic world, disappeared, and Tom did not care if he never saw him again.

### CHAPTER III.

#### TOM HAS A RUN-IN WITH THE WHIPPLES—FATHER AND SON.

Farmer Whipple, for the attempted burglary of whose house Tom Johnson and William Bagley had served a five-year sentence in the penitentiary, lived on a good-sized farm which adjoined the Pennington's.

He was not a popular man in the neighborhood, but that fact didn't worry him.

He was also a man of strong prejudices, who never forgave a real or a fancied injury, and his wife and son, Ezra, were very much like him.

Bagley might have got off with a lighter sentence, as it was shown at his trial that he hardly knew what he was about the night of the robbery, but for Whipple's animosity.

While Bagley was serving his time, the Whipple family made things as hard as they could for poor Mrs. Bagley, though everybody knew that she had no hand in or sympathy with, her husband's crime.

Tom Sheridan, when he came to live with his aunt, also came in for his share of the Whipple family's aversion and suspicion.

Ezra Whipple hated Tom because he was much better-looking than himself, and because he soon established himself in the favorable estimation of the girls and boys in the neighborhood which he never could do himself.

He tried his best to lord it over Tom on the strength of the fact that his father was regarded as one of the most prosperous farmers in the county, and because Tom was poor.

But it didn't work very well, for Tom was independent and wouldn't stand any nonsense from any one.

The fact that Ezra lived in the finest and biggest house

outside of Liberty didn't impress Tom with a sense of young Whipple's superiority.

Both he and Bob had Ezra down pretty fine.

They knew him for a blow-hard and a coward—a boy ready to make the most of any advantage that came his way, but the first to put up a squeal when things went against him.

One morning, Mr. Pennington sent Tom over to Farmer Whipple's to borrow a small tool which he wanted to use, but found he could not buy in Liberty.

Tom would rather have been excused from the errand, but as Bob had gone to the village for something, there was no one else to go.

So he put on his best clothes, none too good at that, and started for the Whipple farmhouse, a rather imposing three-story, square-built frame structure fronting directly on the road.

There stood a small barn between the fence surrounding the house and the fence encircling the field beyond, and Tom, seeing somebody at work therein, walked in.

The somebody in question was Ezra in his working clothes.

The moment his eyes lighted on Tom his brow clouded.

"What do you want here?" he asked, in a surly tone.

Tom mentioned the object of his errand in a pleasant way.

"I don't know nothin' about the tool," replied Ezra.

"Where can I find your father?" asked Tom.

"Dunno. Go hunt for him," replied Ezra, ungraciously.

"Is he out in one of the fields?"

"No, he ain't."

"Is he in the house?"

"No, he isn't in the house."

"Look here, Ezra Whipple, why can't you talk to a fellow in a civil manner?" asked Tom, disgusted with the snapishness shown by the other.

"I don't want to talk to you at all. I don't want nothin' to do with a common boy like you. Your uncle was a jail-bird, and your aunt was a——"

"Don't you dare say a word against my aunt," exclaimed Tom, threateningly. "If you do, I'll make you sorry for it."

"Keep away from me or I'll hit you with this shovel," snarled Ezra. "If my father was here he'd kick you off the farm. We don't want you around here."

"You're a nice boy, you are, I don't think," retorted Tom, holding himself in check with an effort.

"Yah!" snorted Ezra, favoring him with a vindictive look. "Why don't you go when I tell you we don't want you around?"

"I'm going. I wouldn't waste my time on such a disagreeable young cub as you are," answered Tom, turning around and walking out of the barn.

He walked to the corner of the field fence where there was a wide gate communicating with the pasture, and paused, undecided whether to wait awhile for the owner of the property or not.

At that moment a horse and wagon came tearing up the road.

Farmer Whipple was standing up and pulling hard but ineffectually at the reins.



To avert a smash-up against the fence, Tom grabbed the gate and swung it open.

The horse, which was frightened and unmanageable, dashed blindly at the opening and passed through.

The wagon was not quite so fortunate.

The hub of the forward wheel came into collision with the gatepost.

Crash!

The wagon came up all standing, the horse tore itself free and kept on, pulling the farmer, who had lost his balance through the shock, over the dashboard.

Ephraim Whipple turned a half sommersault, struck the animal's back and tumbled, head first, into the dirt, where he was dragged several yards before the reins slipped from his fingers.

Ezra had rushed out of the barn as the runaway approached the fence and saw Tom's prompt action which clearly saved the horse's life.

Then he stood gazing, open-mouthed, at the stranded wagon which filled up the opening, while Tom vaulted the fence and hastened to Farmer Whipple's aid.

"You're not hurt, are you, Mr. Whipple?" asked Tom, as he raised him up.

The farmer spat out a mouthful of dirt and gazed about him in a bewildered manner.

For the moment he hardly knew what had happened to him.

If Tom had told him that an earthquake had just shaken up the neighborhood he would have believed the boy.

His face was all streaked with moist soil, and his iron-gray hair was plastered with it, while his clothes looked as if they had been in a mangling machine.

He was certainly a sight.

"Who are you?" asked the farmer, as he began to come to himself.

"Tom Sheridan."

The farmer rubbed his eyes and stared at him with a hard look.

"What are you doin' here?"

"Mr. Pennington sent me over to borrow——"

"He ain't got no business to send you here to borry nothin'. I don't want you on my property, d'ye understand. I won't have none of the Bagley brood around here. Fust thing I know my house might be robbed ag'in."

"What do you take me for, Mr. Whipple?" asked Tom, indignantly.

"I don't take you for nothin' good. So git out of here jest as quick as you kin, or I'll sot one of the dogs on you."

"All right. I'll report your generous reception of me to Mr. Pennington," replied Tom, thoroughly disgusted with the farmer. "If it hadn't been that I opened the gate your horse would have probably broken his legs, and you'd had to shoot him, while you might have broken your own neck. If you were half way decent you wouldn't treat me this way after what I did for you; but I suppose you don't know any better," concluded Tom, sarcastically, for he was pretty mad at the farmer's words.

"What's that, you young whippersnapper?" roared Mr. Whipple, furiously. "You dare to talk to me in that fashion. Just wait till I git my whip, I'll make your back tingle."

He scrambled to his feet and started for the wagon.

Tom, perceiving that the farmer intended to adopt rigorous measures, concluded not to wait for him to carry out his inhuman intentions.

He jumped the fence as the man began to climb into the wagon after the whip.

"Stop him, Ezra!" he shouted to his son. "Don't let him git away. He insulted me, and I'm goin' to take it out of his hide."

Tom made no attempt to run, as he considered that would be both undignified and cowardly.

He simply walked off without paying any attention to Ezra.

The boy, however, encouraged by his father's presence, started to head Tom off.

Tom made an effort to avoid him, but finding that he couldn't, stopped.

"If you know what's good for you, you won't block my way, Ezra Whipple. I am on the public road now, so get out of my way."

"You can't get away from here till you've had a lickin'." grinned Ezra.

"Can't I? We'll see about that. Are you going to move?"

"No, I'm not."

Tom seized him like a flash and tripping him up walked on, leaving him wallowing in the dust and yelling that he was killed.

Ephraim Whipple, whip in hand, leaped from the wagon and came tearing after Tom, with blood in his eye.

"You young rascal! I'll skin ye within an inch of your life!" he shouted.

Seeing that he could not escape unless he took to his heels, which he scorned to do, Tom stopped and faced the irate farmer.

"I wouldn't advise you to touch me with that whip, Mr. Whipple," he said, calmly and deliberately. "You might regret it. You have no right to attempt to strike me for merely coming here on an errand for Mr. Pennington."

Ephraim Whipple paused within arm's length of him and glaring at him, said:

"You've insulted me, you beggar's brat, and I intend to thrash you."

"You mean you've insulted me several times yourself," returned Tom.

"Lick him, father, lick him good!" shouted Ezra, from a safe distance.

"Insulted you!" roared the farmer, amazed at what he considered the boy's impudence. "Why, you——"

Rage prevented further intelligible utterance, but it urged him on to immediate vengeance.

He raised the whip and lashed Tom around the body with it.

Quick as a wink, the boy seized the lash, sprang forward, grabbed the handle and wrenched the whip from the farmer's hand.

Then he tossed it over into a field on the opposite side of the road.

As he proceeded to walk away, Farmer Whipple sprang at him, like a wild beast, aiming a blow at his head.

Tom ducked, put out his foot, and his enemy measured his length in the road.



The boy took advantage of his opportunity to walk quickly away, which he was permitted to do without further molestation.

## CHAPTER IV.

### TOM GETS INTERESTED IN A MONEY-MAKING SCHEME.

When Tom got back to the Pennington farm he reported the unfruitful result of his mission, and also told Mr. Pennington of the run-in he had had with both Farmer Whipple and his son.

"I'm not particularly surprised at Ephraim Whipple's conduct," said Mr. Pennington. "He is the most pig-headed and unreasonable man I have ever run across. His son is a chip of the old block, with the ignorance of youth added."

"You don't blame me for resenting their attitude toward me, do you, sir?" said Tom. "I didn't look for Mr. Whipple to thank me for saving his rig from a total smash-up, but I did expect he'd behave decent."

"Of course, I don't blame you, Tom. Whipple only got a small portion of what he richly deserved. I guess I'll have to send you over to the Kenilworth Farm for that harness tool, though I am not sure that Brown has it. Whipple has it, I know, but I might have known that he's not an accommodating man. You needn't start till after dinner."

"All right, sir," replied Tom, starting for the barn to resume the job he had left unfinished.

When Bob returned, Tom told him all about what had happened to him over at the Whipple farm, and Bob was tickled to death at his description of the tumble the old farmer had got when his wagon collided with the gate post.

"I wish I had been there at the time," he chuckled. "It must have been as good as a circus act."

"It was, if you can imagine Whipple as the clown of the show."

"Then you tumbled Ezra into the road, eh?"

"I did that when he tried to hold me up so his father could get at me with his whip. I just took him by surprise. Then he lay in the dust and yelled murder."

"For a chap of his size and strength he's got mighty little pluck."

"He acts as though he had none at all, though I've heard that he's brave enough when he tackles a boy of about half his age."

"That's right. None of the boys like him, while they all like you. It's the same way with the girls. That's why he's dead nuts on you. He's jealous of you. The old man is sore on you because you're related in a way to Bagley, and he hates Bagley because of his connection with that robbery. If Bagley hadn't gone to the Old Boy of his own accord, I've no doubt he'd have hounded him out of the county. There's precious little charity in Whipple's make-up."

"He and Mr. Bagley were not good friends before that unfortunate affair," said Tom. "At least my aunt told me so. That probably accounts for Whipple being so hard on him the moment he got him in his power."

"I guess so," replied Bob.

At that moment the bell rang for dinner and the boys adjourned to the big kitchen, where the table was laid.

When the meal was over, Tom started for the Kenilworth Farm.

It was about five miles away, and he was going to walk the distance.

It took him about an hour to reach the place, and he found Mr. Brown, the owner, in his little office, which was an annex to the kitchen.

Tom handed him the note he had brought from Mr. Pennington.

Mr. Brown read it, and said he had the tool in question and would be happy to loan it.

Telling Tom to wait, he went out to his barn to get it.

The Kenilworth Farm was the biggest fruit and produce farm in the State.

The nearest railroad station to which he had to cart his goods every day, was three miles to the west of Liberty village, or nine miles from the Kenilworth Farm.

This made the carriage of his products quite an item to Mr. Brown.

Just before Tom reached the farm, Mr. Brown had received a letter from the freight department of the railroad line, notifying him of an increased rate that would go into effect on the first of the month.

As Mr. Brown's monthly freight bill was considerable as it was, he certainly did not relish the idea of paying more.

His only satisfaction was that his rival, the Ivanhoe Dairy and Fruit Farm, a mile distant, would be in the same boat.

A few minutes later Hiram Jones, proprietor of the Ivanhoe Farm, made his appearance.

He said he had called to see if he and Mr. Brown, being extensive shippers, couldn't petition the railroad company jointly, with some effect, to secure a rebate from the new tariff about to go into effect.

"This new schedule is bound to make a hole in our income, Mr. Brown," he said. "I consider it an outrage, but the railroad has us tied hand and foot because there is no other way by which we can get our stuff to the Toledo market. If there was only some means by which we could ship our stuff to Cherryville on the Maumee, where a connection could be made with the Maumee Navigation Co.'s boat, I'd be in favor switching off from the railroad altogether and sending our products all the way by water."

"Cherryville is twenty miles from here via the Maumee Branch, and it is forty-five miles by river from there to Toledo. Transport of our goods by water, if such a thing was possible, would take three times as long as it does now by rail," said Mr. Brown.

"Not quite, Mr. Brown," replied Mr. Jones. "Remember, it takes us a good hour and a half to carry our products to the station. It wouldn't take but a third of that time to carry them to a convenient wharf on the Maumee Branch."

"True enough; but what's the use of talking about such a thing when there is no suitable means of carrying our stuff down to Cherryville?" said Mr. Brown.

"Of course," said Mr. Jones. "This idea of mine is purely a visionary plan, I must admit, but I wish some-



body took a notion to send a steamboat up the branch as far as Liberty."

"It wouldn't pay, I guess, or I have no doubt somebody would have put such a thing into execution before this."

"I think a small boat did run up the branch years ago before the railroad was built through this part of the State."

"I never heard of it, but then you've lived here longer than I. The railroad was very accommodating before it was absorbed by the P., Ft. W. & C., and made a part of its system. These big trunk lines have things their own way, and shippers have to suffer. The railroad makes the rate and we have to pay it. That's about all there is to it. We'll either have to continue using the railroad or go out of business."

The gentlemen talked for some time longer on the subject of the rapaciousness of the railroad, and once or twice Mr. Jones referred to the river route again as something much to be desired but not to be expected.

Tom, instead of reading the magazine, found more interest in listening to their conversation, and by the time the interview was ended he found himself speculating upon Mr. Jones's idea of a freight line down the Maumee Branch, which formed the southern boundary of the Pennington and Whipple farms, to Cherryville.

"I think there would be money in it," he said to himself, after the two men had walked outside. "If I had the money to start such a thing I'd like nothing better than to go into it. I know a small steamboat laid up in Cherryville that would just fill the bill. I believe she could be bought cheap and run cheap. It's a wonder Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones wouldn't buy her and run her in their own interest. But probably they don't know anything about her. I think it might pay me to look into the matter in their interest. I could find out the price of the boat, what it would cost to run her up and down the branch every day, and other particulars. Then I could submit the scheme to Mr. Jones, who seems to be stuck on a water route to Cherryville, and then if he liked it and succeeded in interesting Mr. Brown in the project, and they started it, I'd probably be able to secure a good job on, or in connection with, the boat."

Mr. Brown now came back with the harness tool that Mr. Pennington wanted, and handed it to Tom, who thanked him for the loan of it and started back for the farm.

He could think of nothing else on his way but the new water freight route from that locality to Cherryville, and the more he considered it the more enthusiastic he grew over it.

He was tired of farm work, and ambitious to get into something that promised a future for him.

He was a born hustler, anyway, and thoroughly believed in the old fable "that heaven helps those who help themselves."

Many fascinating schemes had presented themselves to his mind before this, but as all required money to put into practice, and as he had no money, nor saw an immediate prospect of accumulating a sum large enough to fill the bill, he had been obliged to forget them, for the time being at any rate.

Somehow or another this water freight route strongly

appealed to Tom, and he grew quite excited over the possibilities he thought he saw in it.

At any rate, by the time he got back to the farm he was fully resolved to look into the matter for all it was worth, and when Tom Sheridan determined to do a thing he always did it if it was possible to get around it.

## CHAPTER V.

### TOM VISITS CHERRYVILLE AND MEETS WITH A GREAT SURPRISE.

That evening Tom talked the water freight route over with Bob.

"That's a bang-up idea, Tom," said young Pennington, enthusiastically.

"That's what I think. If I can get these two big shippers to take a practical interest in it, I consider I'm sure of a job. They might even let me manage it for them, considering that I'm the person to bring it forward in working shape."

"Why, of course you'd get a job, and a good one. Brown and Jones are the most important people in this section of the county. I'd like to get a job on the boat, too. I'm sick of farming."

"Would your father let you make a change?"

"Sure he would, if he thought it would benefit me."

"Well, I'd like to have you in with me, first-rate. By the way, do you think your father would help the scheme along by letting his wharf on the branch he used for a steamboat landing?"

"Why not? He doesn't use it now at all. Besides, he could then ship farm stuff himself by water instead of carting it over to the railroad. I'll bet he'd take to your idea right off."

"Then, another thing, Brown and Jones would have to get the right of way from the county road, through your lane, down to the wharf, so they could cart their products to the river. Of course, your father would be entitled to some concession for this privilege."

"Oh, he wouldn't stand in the way if it was the matter of public service. He isn't that kind of man. Now, if it was Farmer Whipple, you might make up your mind right now that he wouldn't let any man alive use his lane if he thought any one was going to benefit by it."

"You're right; he wouldn't."

"He's got a wharf, too, and would expect the boat to stop at his place. It would make him boiling mad if he was cut out and forced to keep on using the railroad."

"That would be poor policy—cutting off one's nose to spite his face. His money is as good as any one else's, and I'd take it every time if I was running a freight line to Cherryville."

"If you were running the boat as your own speculation, and he knew it, I'll bet he'd rather send his stuff by rail than throw a penny profit in your way."

"That wouldn't surprise me," replied Tom. "He likes me a whole lot, I don't think; especially after to-day."

Next morning Tom told Mr. Pennington that he wanted to go to Cherryville for the day, and he received permission to do so, and some money to pay his expenses.

He walked in to Liberty and took a trolley for the town of Carlyle, a distance of fifteen miles.



There he changed to the Cherryville line, which took him through two other small towns en route, and finally landed him at his destination after a twenty-five mile ride from Liberty.

Cherryville was an enterprising town at the junction of the Maumee River and the Maumee Branch.

The first thing Tom did was to go into a restaurant and get his lunch.

Then he went to the agent of the Maumee River Navigation Co., down on the water front, and made inquiries about the steamer Elsie French.

It was quite possible that the boat had been sold since he last heard about her, and that fact did not strike him until he entered the agent's office.

If she had been disposed of, that would knock his newly conceived scheme into a cocked hat.

On getting an interview with the agent of the steamboat company, he found to his relief that the small steamboat had not been sold.

He found that she could be chartered by the day, week or month, or longer for that matter, at a sliding scale, according to the length of time contracted for.

The price included an engineer, fireman, pilot, who acted as captain, and two deckhands.

Tom got the freight rates from Cherryville to Toledo on all the products that he knew Messrs. Brown and Jones shipped East.

He inquired into all matters connected with the enterprise he had in view, and having transacted all the business that brought him to town he boarded a trolley car for Carlyle.

As the car was passing through the suburbs of Cherryville, along a shaded street bordered by the better class of residences, he noticed smoke issuing from the second story front windows of a handsome, three-story mansion, which stood well back from the sidewalk, and was surrounded by a well-kept lawn.

"Look!" cried Tom, excitedly, to the conductor. "That house is surely on fire."

"By George, it is!" replied the man. "That's the home of Sidney French, president of the Maumee River Navigation Company. You'd better jump off and alarm the people, for they don't appear to be aware of the danger they are in. I'll give the alarm from the drug store at the next corner."

Tom sprang from the moving car and rushed into the grounds where the fire was.

He was rather surprised that nobody came running out in the usual panic-stricken fashion, crying "Fire!" and for help.

"Maybe the family is away, but there ought to be a servant or two around in the lower part of the house," he breathed. "I'll make for the kitchen."

He ran toward the rear of the dwelling.

He could not see a soul through any of the windows as he passed.

The kitchen door was closed, and as he laid his hand on the knob to try it, it was suddenly flung open in his way, and two rough-looking men rushed forth, with bundles in their hands.

They collided with the boy, and all three went down in

the ground together in a heap, the bundles flying out of the men's hands.

Tom, who was as agile as a monkey, was first on his feet.

Then he was treated to the surprise of his life as the men, with loud imprecations, picked themselves up.

He recognized one of them.

It was his late aunt's husband, William Bagley.

The other was Tom Johnson, but Tom did not know him, never having seen him before.

The boy was fairly staggered by the unexpected meeting with Mr. Bagley under circumstances that, to say the least, were suspicious.

"You—Tom Sheridan!" gasped Bagley, recognizing him.

"Yes," replied Tom. "What are you doing here?"

"None of your business!" snarled Bagley, looking around for his bundle.

"Yes, it is my business," replied Tom, pluckily. "You two have evidently no right in that house. You've been up to some crooked business. Robbing the place, I'll bet, for the people all seem to be away. You've set the house on fire, too."

"Blast you! You young marplot!" roared Bagley. "I've a great mind to——"

He raised his arm to strike at the boy when at that moment the cry of "Fire!" was raised in the street, and several persons came running into the grounds.

"Quick, you fool!" cried Johnson. "Let's get away. We haven't a moment to lose."

They made a snatch at their bundles to continue their retreat, but Tom blocked them.

Both then made a vicious attack on the boy, to the astonishment of the newcomers on the scene.

"Grab these men!" exclaimed Tom, dodging a vicious blow aimed at him by Johnson. "They're thieves and incendiaries."

Bagley snatched up his bundle and made a dash for the back of the grounds.

Johnson, abandoning his, followed on his companion's heels.

"Don't let them get away!" cried Tom.

Two men started after the retreating rascals, but Johnson and Bagley managed to elude them and got clear off under cover of the excitement.

In the meantime the fire appeared to have got complete control of the second story, the flames bursting from several of the windows, and a dense cloud of smoke rising into the comparatively calm afternoon air.

The fire alarm bell was now ringing out its note, startling everybody in town.

Crowds, attracted by the smoke, began to gravitate toward the scene of the conflagration.

The two engines and the hook and ladder company were also on the wing by this time, creating more excitement on the streets, and drawing boys and idlers in their train.

A big crowd was lined up in the street before the blazing building, and scores of curious spectators invaded the grounds and surrounded the house at a safe distance.

A couple of men followed Tom into the kitchen of the mansion, and the first thing they saw were the bound and gaged forms of the cook and a maid, secured to chairs.

While the men were cutting them loose, Tom dashed up



the back stairs to see to what extent the fire had obtained headway, and to make sure, if possible, that no other person was in peril of their lives above.

The smoke was not so dense at the back as it was in the front of the house, where it was pouring down the main stairs into the hall.

Reaching the first landing, he opened a door communicating with the forward upstairs hall.

A cloud of smoke rolled out into his face.

Gasping and choking, Tom slammed the door shut again.

Recovering himself, he opened another door into a room.

The air was thick with smoke, and the boy, dropping on his hands and knees, crawled toward another door that he dimly made out through the haze.

Reaching up and turning the knob, he partially opened the door.

Dense smoke rolled forth, through which he caught the bright gleam of the flames in the room beyond.

Tom pushed the door shut and with his eyes tingling and his breath coming in quick gasps, he crawled back to the landing.

There was a closed window on the landing.

Tom staggered to it, and, throwing it open, leaned out to catch a breath of air.

His appearance was greeted by a shout from those within range, who took him for an inmate of the house.

With a jingle of bells the first engine and hose-carriage arrived on the scene.

The firemen began to get busy with a pair of hose lines.

At that moment a fresh and thrilling aspect was lent to the situation.

The fire had by this time burned into the third story front, and from one of the windows of that section of the building a frantic scream suddenly issued, and almost immediately a lovely girl of seventeen threw up a lower sash and fell across the sill in a state of mortal terror and collapse.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A GALLANT RESCUE.

A cry of horror went up from the crowd in the street and on that side of the lawn, for the people realized the fair girl's peril.

Tom heard the scream, of course, and looking upward toward the spot whence it had proceeded he saw the girl fall helpless over the window-sill.

Smoke was coming out of the window all around her, and sifting out through the other closed window of the room.

"Great Scott!" cried Tom. "She's in a bad position, and there don't seem to be any way of reaching her. If the hook and ladder was only here now the firemen could easily reach her, but it is impossible to go up to that floor through the house."

Casting his eyes around in feverish anxiety, Tom noted that an expert climber could make his way to the roof by way of the stout gutter-pipe close to his elbow.

But even if he did he could not save the girl without a rope to lower himself to the level of the window, where she lay in a fainting condition.

At that moment Tom noticed that an extended and

stout branch from a big shade tree on the lawn projected right above the window where the girl was.

A resolution instantly formed itself in the boy's mind.

He stepped out on the sill of the window he had been leaning out of and began to climb the iron gutter-pipe like a sailor would the rat-lines of a vessel.

The crowd watched him in surprise and curiosity.

Most of the onlookers probably thought he was crazy, for they could not, of course, understand his purpose, which was to reach the roof.

Several of the firemen shouted to him to come back, but he paid no heed to them.

Onward and upward he went till he reached and grasped the horizontal gutter.

Swinging by this he managed to throw one leg over the coping.

In another moment he had scrambled onto the roof.

As he ran forward to the front of the house, where he was soon half hidden by the smoke, an automobile dashed up into the crowd.

The gentleman in it sprang to the ground and began to frantically make his way through the throng, while the richly dressed lady rose in her seat and gave every manifestation of agony of mind.

Many people recognized them as Sidney French, the owner of the burning house, and his wife.

Tom seized the projecting limb and then looked downward.

He now realized that he had undertaken a very hazardous job.

But he was not a boy to hold back because there was an element of danger to be encountered.

The girl just below him had recovered her senses and began to cry for help in a way that nerved him to make the attempt he had decided on to save her.

A second engine came dashing up on the street, and, though Tom did not know it, the hook and ladder was not far behind.

A score of the spectators had gone down the street to meet the hook and ladder and urge it forward, crying out that a girl was trapped in the third story of the burning house, and that nothing but a ladder could save her.

The crowd in the meantime was watching Tom's actions in great excitement and anticipation.

The people did not seem to get on to his object, even after he had grabbed the limb of the tree.

The general impression was that after climbing up to the roof, and finding he could not reach the girl, he was going to swing off and try to make his way to safety along the tree limb.

In a few minutes, however, they got a clear idea of his purpose when he swung off the roof and then secured a precarious foothold on the sill of the window below, with one foot, while he clung with both hands to the limb.

The tree limb supported him in that position, and the crowd, perceiving that he really intended to try and save Mr. French's daughter, sent up a loud cheer of encouragement.

The girl extended her hands toward him, appealingly.

"Save me, oh, save me!" she cried.

"That's what I'm trying to do, miss," he replied. "Crawl out on the window-sill, then catch hold of me and support



yourself into a standing position. After that, throw your arms around my neck and hold on for your life."

For a moment she hesitated, for it seemed to her as though she must surely fall to the ground.

Seeing her hold back, he began to encourage her to make the effort.

Throwing a frightened glance behind her, and seeing the flames working rapidly toward the spot on which she stood, she no longer refused to take the risk.

Anything seemed better than being burned to death.

Tom's coolness in the face of great peril, and his calm directions, greatly impressed the girl and gave her confidence in him.

Slowly she made her way out on the window-sill, laying hold of Tom's leg as a support, until at last she stood up on what was to her a dizzy height.

"Now throw your arms around my neck and cling on like grim death," he said.

Closing her eyes, as a shudder ran through her frame, she obeyed him.

"Have you got a firm hold?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered, tremulously.

"Now I'm going to swing off."

He released his foot from the window and the branch surged downward under their united weight.

He expected that it might snap off and braced himself for the shock of a fall.

The limb, however, was an uncommonly strong one and only sagged about six feet.

Then they hung twenty feet in the air, but free from the burning building.

The crowd cheered lustily and a half dozen of the firemen gathered underneath to catch them and break their expected fall.

Tom had no idea of letting go.

He had muscles of steel and knew exactly what he intended to do.

As soon as the branch came to a rest he began to make his way, hand over hand, along the limb toward the trunk of the tree.

Everybody saw now that if the girl held on she was bound to escape unharmed, and their satisfaction and relief was great.

The hook and ladder came rushing up at this juncture, and the men tore fiercely at the first ladder on top, a small one, to get it out of the way so they could get a longer one beneath.

The flames, too, were bursting out of the window so recently vacated by the girl.

The crowd saw that but for the boy's heroic act the girl must have perished, for the hook and ladder had reached the scene too late to have taken her from the window.

By the time a ladder was rushed on the grounds, Tom, with his fair burden, had reached a crotch in the tree when she was able to place her foot on one of the limbs below and thus relieve her gallant rescuer of her weight.

Turning around, he planted his foot on another limb and encircled the girl's waist with his arm.

Both were now quite safe from any further danger, and the ladder was raised into the tree to assist them to descend.

The girl was received in her father's arms and fondly embraced.

He had seen the greater part of the rescue with the deepest of anxiety, hardly daring to believe that the boy would succeed in saving her from a bad fall.

As Tom started to leave the spot without waiting to be thanked, he was seized by several of the firemen, who shook him by the hand and told him what a brave act he had accomplished.

They wanted to know his name, and where he lived in Cherryville, and while he was trying to answer their questions, Mr. French came forward with his daughter on his arm and began to express his gratitude to the boy in no uncertain terms.

The fireman had by this time got several streams on the flames, and were working like good fellows to try and save as much of the house as was possible.

"What is your name, my boy?" Mr. French asked Tom.

"Tom Sheridan," he answered.

"Come with us, Sheridan. My daughter can't thank you here, and she is anxious to express her gratitude. My wife will want to thank you also."

Tom rather shrank from the gaze and plaudits of the crowd as they made their way to the automobile, where Mrs. French sat in a state of intense anxiety, although the crowd had informed her that her daughter had been saved, and she herself had had an indistinct view of the rescue.

Mrs. French sprang out of the vehicle and clasped her child to her heart, while the crowd cheered again.

Mr. French, holding on to Tom, led his wife and daughter over to the residence of a neighbor on the other side of the street, where they were received with sympathy for their trouble and congratulations over the escape of Miss French.

Tom had already learned that the girl's name was Elsie, and now that he was able to get a good look at her he saw how pretty she was.

As soon as she got the chance she turned to Tom, and, with tears in her eyes, thanked him for what he had done for her.

"You're the bravest boy in the world," she exclaimed, regarding him with a look of interest and admiration. "I never will forget you as long as I live—never!" she added, emphatically.

It seemed a harder trial for Tom to muster suitable words to reply to her than it had been to save her from the fire.

He felt decidedly embarrassed in her presence, and before the others, for he was not accustomed to associate with people of their social standing.

Elsie perceived the state of his feelings, and tried in the most delicate way to put him at his ease.

In the end she succeeded, and Tom was sure she was the nicest girl he had ever met.

Tom explained that he did not live in Cherryville, but had merely come on business from a farm near Liberty.

He said he guessed it was time for him to start on his return, as it would take him some time to get back to his temporary home.

The Frenchs, when they learned how far he had to go, would not hear of his going back that day, the afternoon being already nearly spent.



"You must stay here till to-morrow morning at least," insisted Mr. French, and Tom finally yielded a reluctant consent to do so.

The family who had tendered hospitality to their burned-out neighbors, were glad to include Tom for the night, at any rate, for they considered that his heroic conduct entitled him to every consideration at their hands.

So Tom became as one of them for the time being.

The fire was got under control by this time through the well-directed efforts of the local fire department, and the greater part of the dwelling was saved, though most everything of real value in the building was more or less injured by water and smoke.

However, the place and its contents were fully insured, and Mr. French was not likely to suffer a very large financial loss.

Elsie, after a time, took possession of Tom herself, and the two young people were soon on a most friendly footing.

By the time the fire was out the silvery tones of a bell announced that dinner was on the table, and all adjourned to the dining-room, where Tom's embarrassment returned in the presence of a table display to which he was unused.

However, he managed to get through the meal without making any mistakes that might not be readily excused, and it was with a feeling of great relief that he accompanied Elsie back to the porch, where they found that the crowd had entirely dispersed and that the engines had departed, only a watchman from one of the companies remaining behind to guard the burned building.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TOM SECURES A FAIR AND INFLUENTIAL BACKER.

"Do you know it seems most remarkable to me that it should turn out to be my fortune to save you, Miss French," said Tom, as he and Elsie sat alone on the veranda after dinner. "If it had been any other girl it wouldn't have been so significant."

"I don't think I quite understand you, Mr. Sheridan," said Elsie, in some surprise.

"Then I guess I'll have to explain," he replied. "I came to Cherryville on business connected with a small steamboat called the Elsie French."

"The boat that was named after me?"

"I suppose she must have been, seeing that she bears your name, and your father is president of the company that owns her."

"The company does not own her. She belongs to me."

"Does she?" answered Tom, not a little astonished.

"Why, I thought——"

"The company never owned her at all. She belonged to my father when he was the owner of the line that ran between Toledo and Fort Wayne. That was many years ago. When business increased so that the small boats were inadequate to the demands of the business my father formed the Maumee River Navigation Company. Three large steamers were built and put into commission, and the smaller ones my father sold; that is, all except the Elsie French, which was the very first boat he had built when I was an infant. He made her a present to me, and I have made quite a bit of pin money out of her since."

"So she really is your property?"

"She is really and truly all mine."

"Why, I came to Cherryville to see if she was for sale."

"Did you? Who wanted to buy her?"

"Well, no one wanted to buy her, Miss French, but I was thinking of getting a couple of people up my way to buy her, if I could induce them to go into a scheme I had formed to help them ship their products to the Toledo market by water."

"I am afraid that I wouldn't consent to sell the boat, Mr. Sheridan. Have you any objection to telling me what your scheme is? Of course, I don't want to pry into your business, so you needn't tell me if you don't want to."

"I'll tell you the whole thing, Miss French. I had a talk with the company's agent, and he told me that the boat was open to a charter for any length of time on satisfactory contract, so I thought that such an arrangement might be made to answer even better than if the boat had to be purchased, though, of course, it would be more expensive in the long run to the persons I am hoping to interest in my scheme."

"You have some transportation plan in view, then?" she said, with a look of interest.

"Yes. The general freight agent of the A. & T. branch of the P., Ft. W. & C. road has just notified shippers along the line of an advance in freight rates to take effect from the first of next month. This will hit several persons in our part of the county pretty bad, and from what I heard one of them say I am almost sure they would welcome a cheaper means of transportation to Toledo, even by water, if their products could be landed at the market in any sort of reasonable time. As the case stands, they have no way of reaching the boats of the Maumee River Navigation Company at this point, for their farms are twenty miles up the branch. Now, I thought if they could get a small steamer to bring their stuff down the branch to Cherryville, the Navigation Company would be able to transport the freight from here to Toledo."

"Of course, that could be done all right," replied Elsie.

Tom then told the girl that his object was to secure a good job out of the scheme that he called himself the originator of.

"If I only had money enough myself to start the enterprise I'd run it on my own hook as my own business and make money. Nothing would suit me better than to do that, for I am ambitious to get along in life on my own merits, and some day I will succeed in doing so," he added, with a determined nod of his head.

"Suppose that I was to let you have the use of the Elsie French, do you think you could run the business you have in mind, profitably?" asked the girl.

"Let me have the use of her?"

"Yes. You know that in saving my life you have done me a service I never can repay in full. I should like to express my obligation in some manner, however, that would be of benefit to you. Now, I am very much interested in this scheme of yours to carry freight down the Maumee Branch to this town. You have just said that if you had money enough to go into it yourself you would be glad to do it, and that you think you could make money. Well, I want to help you carry out your ambitious views. You shall have the Elsie French, fully manned and equipped,



just as I charter her, for six months or longer, if necessary, free of charge. Won't that give you the start you long for?"

"Miss French, you cannot mean that?" exclaimed Tom, almost bewildered by the proposal.

"I do mean it. Furthermore, I am sure my father will make special rates with you on all freight that you transfer to his steamers at this town for transportation to Toledo. He will be more than glad to do anything to help you make the business a success, for he will always be under obligations to you for what you did for me. You will do well to have a talk with him this evening on the subject. He will help you put the business in shape, for he is thoroughly familiar with all the details of transportation by water."

"Miss French, you are giving me the opportunity of my life. I am sure to succeed, provided, of course, that I can make a long contract with the two shippers in my neighborhood. But I cannot accept such liberal terms as you offer me. You will let me repay you out of the profits, won't you? I should feel more independent."

"But I don't want you to repay me, Mr. Sheridan," she said. "I want to do all this because it gives me the opportunity to express my gratitude to you in what my father would call a substantial manner."

"You are very kind to offer to put me on my feet in this business, but I would rather make the business pay everything. I think you will be doing all that I ought reasonably expect if you will simply give me a start by allowing me to get into your debt until I am able to turn myself."

"Perhaps you would agree to another proposal on my part. Would you accept me as a silent partner in your scheme. I will provide the steamer and cost of running her, you will provide the business to make her pay. We will form a company, say—you and I. You can be president and general manager, while I'll be the secretary. I think I should enjoy the sensation of being in business."

"Why, that would be just the thing!" cried Tom, with enthusiasm.

"I should want it understood, though, that it will, in the end, be your business. I am a girl, with a rich father, and consequently well provided for. You are a boy, who will soon be a man, with a future to make for yourself. I am going into this plan simply to help you. While I remain in the company I will be your partner, but when I retire from the arduous," she smiled, "duties of the secretaryship, the company will thereafter be wholly yourself, unless you care to take another partner."

"Anything you say goes, Miss French, though it is a mighty liberal arrangement for me. I will talk to your father about the matter as soon as I get the chance. Then I will call on the proprietors of Kenilworth and Ivanhoe farms and try to get them to give me their business on trial. Should they refuse to make a change from the railroad when it comes to a pinch, then the whole scheme will, as a matter of course, fall through, and I will have to think of something else in which to make a start in life."

They talked the matter over awhile longer, both being intensely interested in it, and then Mr. French coming out, Elsie left Tom to open the subject to her father.

Tom laid the whole scheme before the president of the

Maumee River Navigation Co. in a business-like way, and asked his advice on the subject.

He told the gentleman of his daughter's generous offer and asked him if it met with his approval.

Mr. French was very much interested in Tom's project.

He asked the boy many questions, and seemed to be much struck with his ambitious plans to start himself in business.

He said that he was very glad that Elsie had made the offer to him, and assured Tom that he could rely on his advice and assistance at any and all times.

"It is impossible that either of us can ever repay you even a small part of the obligation we are under to you, but it will give us a great deal of satisfaction to assist you in any way we can," said Mr. French. "This navigation project of yours naturally interests me, as it is the same business, on a limited scale, as that I have been in so long myself. I think you will be able to make it pay so far as your needs are concerned, and it will give you an education in the business that will be valuable to you hereafter. I will make you a special rate on all the freight you turn over to our company at this town, so as to increase your profits. Now, in order to help you to gain the confidence of these two shippers on whom you rely to put the business into running order, I will give you an official letter endorsing your plan and guaranteeing to see you through a year's contract. That will enable them to understand just where they are, if they sign an agreement for that time with you."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. French," replied Tom, gratefully. "That ought to fetch them, for Mr. Jones really only wants a good excuse to abandon the railroad."

Mr. French then proceeded to give Tom some good, practical advice on navigation matters, and others points that he would need to know if he embarked in the enterprise he was trying to push through.

"Let me know as soon as possible how things are coming, and by all means refer to me as your backer in the business when you find such a recommendation will be of assistance to you."

In the morning, after bidding Elsie and her mother goodbye, Tom accompanied Mr. French to his office in the agent's building.

The general offices of the company were in Toledo, and there was an agent at all the towns along the river that the boats made a landing.

Mr. French went to Toledo about once a week, but transacted a good deal of the company's business at Cherryville.

Mr. French introduced Tom to the local agent, and then taking him into his own office wrote a strong letter supporting Tom's navigation plan, and guaranteeing to co-operate with him from Cherryville to Toledo.

He drew a schedule of rates from Liberty to Cherryville, and then added the company's rates from thence to Toledo.

"You can make that the basis of your charges and submit it to Messrs. Brown and Jones. As soon as you have signed a contract with them and are ready to go right ahead I will let you know the rebate I will allow you on your freight from this point, east."



After some further conversation Tom parted from Mr. French and started for Liberty, feeling like a bird.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DISCUSSING THE PROJECT.

Tom built a great many air-castles on his way back to the Pennington farm, which he reached early in the afternoon.

The first thing he did was to hold an interview with Mr. Pennington.

He laid his transportation project before the farmer, showed him the letter he got from Mr. Sidney French, and asked him what he thought about the scheme.

Mr. Pennington was very much astonished.

"Why, Tom, I had no idea you were such a progressive boy," he said. "But how can you expect to run such a business when you have had no experience in it?"

"I'll run it all right, Mr. Pennington," replied Tom, confidently.

"You seem to have great confidence in yourself. But tell me how did you manage to interest Mr. French in the matter? His letter indicates his willingness to give you his unqualified support. In fact, he guarantees to see you through for a year at least. Such backing as that from a stranger is unprecedented in my experience."

"Well, I secured it through a most fortunate circumstance," answered Tom, who then described how he had saved the life of Elsie French at her burning home.

He explained to Mr. Pennington that his visit to Cherryville was wholly with a view to get information and rates to submit to Messrs. Brown and Jones, with the hope that they would take up the scheme themselves, in which event he expected to get a job on the boat.

His rescue of Miss French, however, had entirely altered his original idea, and put him in the position to start the business on his own hook under the most favorable conditions.

"I can understand now how the case stands," said the farmer. "You are a very fortunate boy in having secured so powerful a friend, for even should this scheme miss fire through the refusal of the two shippers to avail themselves of your offer to transport their products to Toledo by water, Mr. French is bound to provide well for your future in some other way."

"Now, Mr. Pennington, even if everything turns out favorably for me in my interview with Mr. Jones and Mr. Brown, I can do nothing without your help."

"How is that?" asked the farmer, in some surprise.

"Why, I must have a landing place or wharf in this vicinity where I can take freight. There are only two wharves suitable for this purpose. One is on Farmer Whipple's property, the other on yours. Of course, you will understand that the Whipple wharf is out of the question for me to consider. That farmer would about as soon cut his head off as to let me have the use of it."

Mr. Pennington nodded, with a half smile.

"So," continued Tom, "I must rely on you to let me use your wharf if I am to engage in the business. Then to reach the wharf you will have to concede the right of way through your lane from the road to the wharf. That is a more serious matter for you to consider, but I am

prepared to pay you for the use of it, either in money or in transportation privileges, for I can carry your produce to Toledo at a less rate than the railroad charges even under its present schedule which is to be superseded by a higher one on the first of next month, as you probably know."

"Don't worry, Tom. You shall have the use of both the wharf and the lane at a fair figure. In fact, I welcome the prospect of a boat up the branch. It would save me a lot of hauling over four miles of road to the station. To be able to ship my stuff direct to Toledo right from my own door is a great consideration to me, and is of itself easily worth the rent of the wharf privileges."

"Then you are willing to make a year's contract with me to that effect, are you, Mr. Pennington? And you will permit the right of way through your lane to any shipper that wishes to reach the wharf if I agree to pay you a reasonable compensation?"

"Yes, Tom," replied the farmer, whose admiration of the boy's energetic business ideas had expanded greatly since the commencement of their talk.

"Thank you, Mr. Pennington. This is very friendly on your part and I shan't forget it, whether the scheme goes through or not."

"I sincerely trust it may go through, my lad. Your tact and perseverance surely ought to succeed. At any rate, I will do all I can to help you reach the goal of your ambition."

"Then I shall start the ball rolling with the big shippers to-morrow morning. I am anxious to open negotiations with them before they commit themselves to the railroad for another year."

After supper Tom and Bob went down to the wharf, and then the former told his friend all that had happened to him in Cherryville, and how successfully his scheme had panned out so far.

Bob was as astonished as his father.

"Then you're going to start the business for yourself, run it yourself and capture all the profits."

"That's the idea exactly," replied Tom.

"You were certainly born for good luck. Did you carry a rabbit's foot in your pocket when you went to Cherryville yesterday morning?"

Tom laughed.

"I don't possess such an article," he answered.

"I guess you don't need one. A fellow who tumbles into such good fortune as you have done can give cards and spades to those who rely on rabbit's feet. Well, as soon as you start this steamboat on the branch you're going to give me a job, aren't you?"

"I'll be glad to do so if your father has no objections."

"I'll answer for him. What do you suppose I can do?"

"Well, you might be my chief assistant. You could take full charge of this wharf, receive all freight brought here for shipment, make out the waybills in duplicate, see that everything was properly loaded on the boat, for I will be responsible for any damage to freight after it once has been delivered at the wharf, and attend to such other matters as the local agent at this end will be expected to look after. Understand?"

"Sure," replied Bob, enthusiastically. "That job will



just suit me, and I will attend to things right up to the queen's taste, see if I don't."

"I'll have to lease a wharf, or rather the right to use one in part, up at Liberty. I'm going to call my business the 'Liberty and Cherryville Transportation Company,' with the chief office at Liberty. The agent of the Maumee River Navigation Company at Cherryville will act as agent for me in that place, so Mr. French told me, which will give tone and importance to my venture."

"You can bet it will."

"And, let me tell you a secret, Bob, which you mustn't give away, Miss Elsie French is going to take a personal interest in the line, and will manage, in a general way, the Cherryville end."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Bob, with open mouth.

"Yes, she's enthusiastic over the idea of having something to do in connection with my scheme. The boat I'm going to use is her personal property, and she's going to furnish me with all the funds necessary to start the enterprise."

"Geewilkins!" ejaculated Bob. "Why, you've fallen into a regular butter-tub."

"Butter-tub or not, Bob, it's up to me to make good. I should feel like thirty cents if I failed after getting such a splendid start as I am assured of."

"Don't worry. You'll make good all right. A fellow who can originate such a big scheme and push it through to a practical start is not going to slip up."

"I hope not; but the matter isn't settled yet by a long way. Everything depends on my being able to talk Mr. Jones and Mr. Brown into a regular contract."

"You ought to be able to do that with the backing you have. They can't lose, with Mr. French's guarantee behind the project."

"That's what I depend on, and I have very strong hopes of succeeding. I'll bet the freight agent of the A. & T. will have a fit if the Elsie French goes into commission between Liberty and Cherryville."

"I'll bet he will, too," grinned Bob. "He'll have several fits. You'll hear from him before you're long in business."

"Why should I hear from him? He won't be able to interfere with me."

"Of course he won't, but I'll bet the railroad will try to buy you off."

"The railroad company can't buy me off," replied Tom, with a resolute shake of his head.

"Then they'll try to make trouble for you."

"How?"

"I don't know how; but don't forget you'll be up against not alone the A. & T., but the powerful corporation of which the A. & T. is one of the feeders."

"You mean the P., Ft. W. & C.?"

"That's what I mean."

"Mr. French will see me through."

"He will if he can; but recollect there are a hundred millions or more back of that trunk line."

"Oh, I'll only take a mighty small bit of their trade away. A mere flee bite."

"Everything counts with a big railroad company."

"I don't care. They won't bulldoze me out of business, you can take your oath to that. I may be only a boy,

but I'll fight for my rights just as strongly as if I was a millionaire."

"The railroad may cut rates on you."

"That won't hurt me much, for I'll have a contract for a year at least with the big shippers."

"That's something, of course."

"The shippers will understand, anyway, that the cut rates would only hold good until I was driven out of the business, then the company would get back at them with increased rates to make up its loss."

"That's right. They'd be fools to desert you, for it would cost them dearly in the end."

Tom and Bob then looked over the wharf.

"It won't be large enough, do you think?" said Bob.

"Yes, it will," replied Tom. "I'll arrange with your father for the lease of a portion of this ground here. I'll build a good-sized weather-proof shed, with an office in it for you and your assistant, if you need one, as I fancy you will. All freight will be stored under cover that arrives here for the boat. I'll have hands enough aboard the boat to handle it expeditiously, so that there'll be no delay in loading up the moment the steamer hauls in."

"Shall you take passengers, too?"

"Sure. I'll carry anybody that wants to go by water from Liberty. It will be a pleasanter trip than by trolley, with the change at Carlyle, and five or six miles shorter as well."

"That will be fine. I'll bet you'll have a good many passengers if you don't charge too much."

"The fare by trolley is fifteen cents. I'll have to charge a quarter, but it will be worth it."

It was getting dark now, so the boys returned to the house, but they continued to discuss the subject that was nearest their hearts until they got into bed.

Next morning Mr. Pennington loaned Tom a light rig to visit the two shippers in business-like shape.

"I'll be on pins and needles till you get back with good news," said Bob, who accompanied him as far as the road. "I'm over head and ears interested in this scheme of yours, and I should feel awfully disappointed if it didn't go."

"Oh, I guess it will go all right," said Tom, as he started off.

"I'm just stuck on that job he's going to give me," said Bob to himself, as he watched his friend out of sight. "It hits me on my weak spot. It's several hundred times better than working about the farm. The boys will all be jealous of my good luck, while the girls—well, say, I'll be solid with them, then, bet your life."

## CHAPTER IX.

### HOW TOM CAUGHT ON AND IS THEN ARRESTED.

Tom had no difficulty in securing an interview with Mr. Jones, whom he first visited, as the boy judged he would be the more easily influenced of the two shippers, and half the battle would be won if he succeeded in talking him over.

The proprietor of the Ivanhoe Dairy and Fruit Farm was greatly surprised when Tom broached the object of his call.

He listened with much interest as the boy laid the details of his scheme before him, and his interest assumed



large proportions when Tom handed him Mr. French's letter and he read it over.

"There is my scale of charges on all your products delivered from the wharf on Mr. Pennington's property, which I have secured, to Toledo, via Cherryville, in five to six hours."

Mr. Jones examined the freight rates and noted that they showed an appreciable reduction from the present railroad charges.

"If you will sign a year's contract with me, Mr. Jones," said Tom, "I will have my part guaranteed by Mr. French, so that you will be sure that the agreement will be lived up to to the letter."

Mr. Jones was evidently much impressed by this.

He knew that Mr. French's endorsement would insure the carriage of his goods in good shape and on time.

"Have you spoken to Mr. Brown on this subject yet?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Tom; "but I am going directly to his farm as soon as I leave you."

"When will you be ready to take freight?"

"On the first of the month."

Tom then told him that he had secured the right of way through Mr. Pennington's lane to the wharf on the branch.

He said that he would start at once to put up a first-class freight shed at the wharf for the temporary storage of freight pending the arrival of the boat.

The Elsie French, he said, would make connection with both the early morning boat at Cherryville from Fort Wayne, and the late night-boat for Toledo.

"That will enable you by shipping fruit in the season from my wharf at five o'clock to connect with the Toledo market at daylight, same as you have been doing by the night freight, and you would save the long haul to the station, ten miles from here."

"That is a big object, certainly," replied Mr. Jones.

"My rates are much lower than the railroad's."

"That's true, too."

"Then on the first of the month the railroad rates will be advanced."

Mr. Jones nodded.

"Well," he said, "go over and have a talk with Mr. Brown, and see how he takes to your offer, then come back here and I will give you my answer, which I will consider in the meantime."

"Very well. If Mr. Brown asks me what your views are on it shall I say that you consider them in a favorable light?"

"Yes. You can tell him that I like the idea immensely, and am inclined to sign a contract guaranteed by the president of the Navigation Company."

Tom then drove over to the Kenilworth Farm and interviewed Mr. Brown.

He had a long and interesting conversation with that gentleman.

"Bring me a contract, embodying the following points which I shall insist on, endorsed by Mr. Sidney French, and I will sign it. Remember, you must be prepared to accept freight on the first day of next month," was Mr. Brown's decision, which was quite satisfactory to Tom, who then returned to Mr. Jones.

Tom repeated a portion of the talk he had had with Mr. Brown, and announced his decision.

"Very well," said Mr. Jones. "Bring me a contract containing the following insertions, guaranteed by Mr. French, and I will sign it, the contract positively to go into effect on the first of next month."

"All right," replied Tom. "I will have the contracts here inside of two days."

Mr. Jones invited him to dinner, as it was a little after noon, and Tom accepted the invitation.

After the meal he called on another shipper, not so important as the other two, and succeeded in securing him also for a customer.

"My business is as good as started now," Tom congratulated himself on the road back to the Pennington farm. "The Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Company will soon be an accomplished fact, and the steamboat Elsie French will presently make the water fly twice a day up and down the branch. I wonder what Farmer Whipple and his son Ezra will say when they hear that I'm at the head of the new concern? Will they have a fit? Well, say, they'll turn green with rage. If Mr. Whipple wants to get his produce to the Toledo market at low rates he'll have to see me."

Tom felt about as good as any boy can well feel as he drove along the road.

As he approached a cross-road a buggy, with a boy in it, came up the other road.

Both rigs came together at the crossing, and the other boy, who proved to be Ezra Whipple, whipped up his animal and tried to get ahead.

He only succeeded in getting his wheel locked with Tom's forward one, and both vehicles came to a standstill.

"What do you want to get in my way for?" snarled Ezra, recognizing Tom.

"I rather think it was you who got in my way," replied Tom, pleasantly.

"You lie, Tom Sheridan! It was your fault," snorted Ezra.

"All right; let it go at that," replied Tom. "Let's unlock."

"Back your wagon, then," returned Ezra, who thought he had won his point.

"That won't do any good. Back yours a bit so I can go ahead."

"I won't do no such thing. Do you s'pose I'm going to let you get ahead of me on the road?"

"I don't see how you can help yourself the way things are."

"I can help it. Back your wagon."

"I can't back without carrying your wheel with me. You must be a fool if you can't see that," replied Tom, impatiently.

"Do you mean to call me a fool, you beggar!" roared Ezra, furiously.

"You are acting like one, Ezra Whipple. And I want you to understand that I am no more a beggar than you are," added Tom, angrily.

"How dare you call me a beggar?"

"I didn't call you one."

"Yes, you did."

"Are you going to back your wheel away from mine?"



"No, I'm not."

"Then I'm going ahead and you can take the consequences. Get up, Mollie."

"Are you goin' to upset me?"

"That's your lookout. 'Whoa, girl! I'll give you another chance to draw out.'"

"Back your wagon," insisted Ezra in a dominating tone.

"Look here, Ezra Whipple, if I was to do as you say I might snap your wheel off. If you will back there is room enough for you to get clear."

"I'm not goin' to take no orders from you," replied Ezra, sulkily.

"All right. It's your funeral. Go on, Mollie."

Mollie stepped out, carrying the front wheel clear, but Tom's rear wheel caught the buggy in such a way as to shove it toward the ditch and lift it up on that side as well.

The consequence was that Ezra was spilled out into the bushes, while Tom drove on, leaving his enemy to pick himself up.

His buggy was scratched and the front wheel wrenched.

"I'll make you pay for this, Tom Sheridan," he cried, shaking his fist after the retreating wagon. "My father will have you arrested and sent to the lock-up. Ugh! How I hate you!"

He got into his buggy after getting it out of the ditch and resumed his way, nursing a lot of revengeful thoughts against the boy he disliked.

"Well, Tom, what luck?" asked Bob, when his friend drove into the yard.

"First-class. Brown, Jones and Robinson are going to sign a year's contract each."

"Hurrah!" cried Bob, throwing his cap into the air.

"Three cheers for the Liberty and Cherryville Transportation Company."

Tom told him all the particulars of his visits to the three shippers, and Bob was tickled to death that things were coming out the way he wanted them to.

Mr. Pennington was also pleased to learn of Tom's success, and said there was nothing now to prevent him from going ahead.

"And I'm going right ahead, Mr. Pennington. I shall make my application to-morrow to the Liberty Town Council for wharfage rights on the river front."

"You'll get what you want, for it will be of public benefit for you to run a steamboat up and down the branch from Liberty to Cherryville."

"That's the way I figure it," replied Tom.

After supper that evening Tom told Bob about his unexpected meeting with his late aunt's husband in Cherryville at the scene of the fire.

"He and that other chap had evidently robbed the house, and I guess they accidentally set the place on fire while doing it. Bagley has developed into a full-fledged criminal, and his finish will come pretty soon."

Of course, Bob was surprised to hear that news.

"You didn't tell me about this yesterday," he said.

"No, I hadn't decided whether I'd say anything about it or not, but I don't mind telling you now. Keep it mum."

Bob promised that he would.

"By the way, Bob, I had a run-in with Ezra Whipple on the road this afternoon."

"Did you? What about?"

Tom told his story of how he and Ezra had met at the cross-road, and got mixed up through Ezra's stubbornness in trying to pass him at the wrong moment.

"And you dumped him into the ditch, did you?" chuckled Bob.

"I couldn't help doing it. I wasn't going to stay there all day just because he chose to be ugly and wouldn't do the right thing."

"You served him right. It's a wonder he wouldn't take a tumble."

At that moment a man drove into the yard in a light wagon.

Mr. Pennington went to meet him as he alighted.

The farmer recognized him as one of the town officers.

"How do you do, Mr. Pennington," he said. "I want to see a boy named Tom Sheridan who is stopping with you."

"There he is yonder with my son," said Mr. Pennington, wondering what the officer wanted with Tom.

They both approached the boys.

"I believe you are Tom Sheridan?" said the officer, addressing Tom.

"That's my name."

"You will have to go to town with me."

"What for?"

"I have a warrant for your arrest."

"My arrest!" gasped Tom.

"There must be some mistake," said the farmer. "What is the charge?"

"Assault on Ezra Whipple. He swore out the complaint with his father."

Mr. Pennington looked astonished.

"Do you know anything about this, Tom?" he asked.

Tom explained what had happened in the road.

"Why, this charge is ridiculous," said Mr. Pennington.

"Well, that is for the magistrate to pass on," said the officer. "I must do my duty."

"Their object evidently is to keep me in prison over night," said Tom, indignantly.

"They shan't succeed," said the farmer. "I'll go with you and bail you out."

Accordingly, Mr. Pennington accompanied the officer and Tom to the village.

The officer consented to drive to the magistrate's home, who, after hearing the boy's story, paroled him in the farmer's custody until ten o'clock on the following morning.

## CHAPTER X.

### GETTING INTO SHAPE TO START OPERATIONS.

Next morning, a little before ten, Mr. Pennington, Tom and Bob drove up to the magistrate's office, where they found Ezra Whipple and his father already on hand to press the complaint against the boy they both hated.

Tom was turned over to the custody of the officer and proceedings began.

The charge was read to him and Tom pleaded "Not Guilty."

Ezra was then sworn and stated the case as he viewed it. He also started to tell how Tom had knocked him down



in the road and also had insulted his father when he came over to borrow the harness tool, but the magistrate cut him short, and told him to stick to the facts of the case in hand.

Tom asked permission to cross-examine him, and was accorded the privilege.

Questioning Ezra closely, he compelled him to admit facts so damaging to his story that the magistrate threw the case out and discharged Tom from custody.

Ephraim Whipple and his son withdrew, much disgruntled over the magistrate's decision, while Tom received the congratulations of his friends.

As soon as possible he took a car for Carlyle, where he changed for Cherryville.

On his arrival in that town he found Mr. French at his office.

The president of the Navigation Company was pleased to see him back so soon, and asked him what luck he had had with his scheme.

"I've caught the shippers, sir, and they are ready to sign contracts, provided you will guarantee them."

"I'm ready to do that, my lad."

"Here are the special points each wants inserted in his agreement. You can look them over, and if satisfactory I shall want you to have three contracts drawn up in duplicate. Also an agreement with Mr. Pennington, covering the right of way through his property and the wharf privilege."

Tom then went into the details of his plans, which included the shed for freight at Pennington Landing, as he intended calling it, the leasing of part of a wharf at Liberty, and other matters of importance to the new freight line.

He remained over night at Cherryville, and when he left next morning he carried with him the contracts, and a sum of money sufficient to start the ball rolling.

He reached Liberty in time to attend a regular meeting of the Town Council, and put in his request for the wharf privilege that he required.

His statement that a freight and passenger steamboat was about to be put into commission between Cherryville and Liberty created considerable excitement in the Council room.

He received the assurance of the members of the board that his request would be granted on very easy terms.

Next morning the tri-weekly paper announced that the "Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Company" would run a boat between the two places, beginning on the first of the month.

The publication of the paragraph aroused a good deal of interest in the village, and many of the citizens were of the opinion that it would give Liberty a boom.

That day Tom presented the contracts in turn to the three shippers, and they accepted and signed them.

Then he got an estimate for the shed from a village carpenter, after he had obtained a lease of the necessary ground from Mr. Pennington, and on the day following work was begun on the building.

As soon as he concluded arrangements with the Town Council he had a small shed put up at the head of the wharf, and divided into a ticket and freight office, and a reception-room for passengers.

The printing of tickets, freight waybills and other stationery was prepared for him at Cherryville by an employee of the Navigation Company, and Tom spent a portion of his time in that town in being coached in all matters connected with the business that it was necessary for him to know.

All printed matter bore the name of the new transportation company, and the office stationery in addition carried Tom's name as general manager.

Tom was introduced to the pilot-captain of the Elsie French, who was instructed to look to the boy for his instructions in future.

Bob Pennington having received permission from his father to accept the position of agent for the new transportation company at Pennington Landing, was instructed in his duties by Tom, who also hired a young and bright acquaintance to fill a similar position at Liberty.

Handbills containing the following announcement were circulated in Liberty and throughout the neighborhood:

#### Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Co.

Thomas Sheridan, Gen'l Mgr.

On and after May 1 the Steamer Elsie French will make two trips daily (Sunday excepted) between Liberty and Cherryville, connecting with the fast palatial steamers of the Maumee River Navigation Co. at Cherryville for all points east and west on the Maumee River, leaving Liberty at 7 A. M. and 5 P. M.; leaving Cherryville 2 and 8 P. M. Passenger fare to Cherryville, 25 cents. Excursion, 40 cents. Freight received at Meiggs' Wharf, Liberty, and at Pennington Landing (Pennington Farm). For rates apply to agent at either wharf. Office of company in Liberty, 119 Main Street.

A standing advertisement was also inserted in the Liberty and Cherryville newspapers after a similar fashion.

Bob saw to it that a bunch of the hand-bills were dumped into Farmer Whipple's front yard after dark one night, and Ezra found them there next morning.

He started to read one.

"Thomas Sheridan, general manager," he muttered. "Same name as that beggar over at Pennington's."

Then he read on and presently came to "Pennington Landing (Pennington Farm)."

He rushed into the house to find his father.

"Say dad," he cried, excitedly, "there's a new steamboat line on the Maumee Branch."

"Who says so?" growled the farmer.

"This circular says so. And what do you suppose, one of the landings is at Pennington's wharf."

"What!" roared Farmer Whipple. "Let me see that hand-bill."

He also paused a moment at "Thomas Sheridan, gen'l mgr."

He did not, of course, connect the name with the boy Tom whom he hated, but put it down as a coincidence.

What interested him the most was that this new company had established a landing at Pennington's wharf.

It made him as mad as a hatter to think that his own wharf should have been overlooked when the selection was made.

He figured that Mr. Pennington would make a good



thing out of it, and he felt that he ought to have had this good thing himself.

He was jealous of Farmer Pennington's prosperity, although he had no cause to kick about his own, and this extra slice of luck going to his neighbor in place of coming to himself, galled him terribly.

He determined to go to the company's office and see if he couldn't make a deal to have the steamboat landing transferred to his property.

In order to do Pennington out of it, he was willing to give the company the use of his wharf free for six months.

With that resolve in his mind he harnessed up his buggy and drove into Liberty about eleven o'clock.

He stopped in front of 119 Main Street, where a new gold sign pointed the way to the offices of the new company.

It happened that Bob and Tom were both there at the time, making the final arrangements for the beginning of business on the following Monday.

They were in the private office, the outer room being presided over by a small office boy.

"Is Mr. Thomas Sheridan, manager of the steamboat line here?" asked Farmer Whipple on entering the outer office.

"Yes, sir. Do you want to see him?"

"I do."

"What is your name?"

"Ephraim Whipple."

The office boy entered the private room and told Tom that a man named Ephraim Whipple wanted to see him.

Tom and Bob looked at each other in astonishment.

"What the deuce does he want with you?" asked Bob.

"I give it up," replied Tom. Then turning to his office boy he told him to ask Mr. Whipple to walk in.

## CHAPTER XI.

### OPENING OF THE NEW FREIGHT LINE.

Ephraim Whipple walked into the inner office as if he considered himself the most important man in the county, and he really did.

When his eyes rested on Tom seated at his desk, and Bob by his side, he stopped short and stared, while a hard look came over his features.

"I wish to see the manager," he said, aggressively, intensely disgusted to find that Tom appeared to be attached to the office.

"I am the manager, Mr. Whipple," replied Tom, politely.

"You the manager!" snorted the farmer, angrily. "How dare you tell me such a lie!"

"I am not telling you a lie, sir. I am the general manager of the Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Company. What can I do for you?"

Tom spoke with the dignity that he felt his position as the head of the company called for, and also with studied politeness.

Farmer Whipple seemed to be thoroughly staggered by his statement.

To his eyes it seemed so ridiculously improbable that he couldn't bring himself to believe it.

He stood and glared in a most unfriendly manner at the boy, while Tom waited for him to speak.

"I don't believe such a preposterous statement," he replied at length. "I came here to see the manager of this steamboat line and not to see you."

"Well, Mr. Whipple, I can only repeat what I have just told you—that I am the manager of the steamboat company. I can't help it if you don't believe me. You had better go out and make a few inquiries in order to satisfy yourself. Then I shall be glad to know the errand that brought you here. If it simply refers to the matter of shipping your produce to Cherryville, or Toledo, I will refer you to Robert Pennington, here, who is agent for the company at Pennington Landing. He will be pleased to give you all the necessary information. You will find our rates much lower than those of the railroad, and we guarantee to land your stuff in Toledo via the Maumee River Navigation Company's boats within six hours from the time our boats leave this end of the route."

"May I ask, is this new steamboat line run by boys?" asked the farmer, sarcastically.

"Well, sir, I am running it, and I am a boy, it is true, but I can guarantee thorough satisfaction to shippers. At any rate, Mr. Arthur Brown, of the Kenilworth Farm; Mr. Hiram Jones, of the Ivanhoe Farm, and Mr. Robinson, of the Robinson Farm, have confidence enough in the new line to warrant their signing a year's contract for the carriage of all their products to Toledo. Those three gentlemen, as you well know, are the largest shippers in this part of the county, and would not be likely to break away from the railroad without good and sufficient reason."

"Huh!" replied Farmer Whipple, wiping his brow with his bandana handkerchief. "They must be crazy to take any stock in a common boy like you. I certainly shall call on them and let them know a few things about you that they probably are not aware of."

"You are at liberty to do so, Mr. Whipple," answered Tom; "but I don't believe you will make anything by it. My business with those gentlemen is purely on a business basis. I might also inform you that this steamboat line is backed by the president of the Maumee River Navigation Company, and he guarantees all shipments made from up the branch."

"Well, if you are the manager of this line I don't want anything to do with it."

With those words, Farmer Whipple turned on his heel and strode out of the room, and thence out of the building.

He was not only disgusted, but very angry.

The very idea that such a boy as Tom Sheridan should have the management of a transportation line, even such a short one as between Liberty and Cherryville, fairly nauseated him.

He couldn't understand it, and what he couldn't understand he had no faith in.

He rode straight back home in a very ugly mood, and for the rest of the day made Ezra walk a chalk line, which did not please that young man for a cent.

On the afternoon of the 30th of April, the Steamer Elsie French steamed up the branch and made fast to the wharf at Liberty.

Quite a crowd of curiously disposed people came down to the dock to look at her.



She was a small boat, but a good one in her way.

Having been used for some years merely as a chartered passenger boat, chiefly to take out excursion parties up and down the Maumee River, her cabin appointments were of an up-to-date and attractive order.

Miss French had hired, through her father's agent, a couple of extra deck hands to handle the freight expeditiously.

The pilot-captain brought his family and his belongings up on the boat, and had them moved into a cottage he had already rented in Liberty.

The rest of the men were to eat and sleep on board, and a cook was provided to look after them.

There was a small amount of freight delivered late that afternoon on Meiggs' Wharf for transportation to Cherryville, and this was put on board at once.

Mr. Pennington, Tom and quite a bunch of his young friends were on hand next morning to make the first trip on the boat to Cherryville.

There were also nearly a dozen of the villagers who bought tickets for the initial sail down the branch.

Promptly on time the little steamer, with a display of bunting, and a tooting of her whistle, pulled out from the wharf and headed down the river for Pennington Landing, where considerable freight awaited her.

She was followed by the cheers of a good-natured and enthusiastic crowd, who wished the new line all success.

Bob was on the wharf in a new steamboat cap, with the words agent in gold letters printed on a blue band, as the Elsie French approached the landing.

He felt as big and as important as though he was the chief counsellor of the village.

The steamboat ran alongside the little wharf and made fast.

Then the deckhands got busy with their trucks, and the freight was soon whisked on board.

As soon as the last load had passed over the gangplank, the whistle tooted its warning note, the lines were cast off, and the Elsie French steamed off down the stream and soon disappeared around a bend in the river.

It took one hour and fifty minutes to make the run from Liberty to Cherryville.

Miss French, her father, and a crowd of townspeople were on the Navigation Co.'s wharf to greet the arrival of the little boat on her first trip.

She was received with cheers and the lively strains of the Cherryville Cornet Band.

Everybody aboard was glad he had come, and all were invited to a light collation spread in the Navigation Company's passenger reception-room.

The freight was hardly on the dock before the morning boat down the river came in sight.

She was soon made fast alongside the dock, and her hands bundled the Elsie French's freight aboard in short order.

A few passengers from Cherryville, bound for Toledo, went aboard and then she hauled out and continued her trip eastward.

Everybody who had come down on the Elsie French returned to Liberty on her when she started back at two o'clock.

Tom was in high feather, for his business had opened in a small blaze of glory.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BOX OF MONEY.

Ezra was standing on his father's wharf when the steamboat left Pennington Landing and passed up toward Liberty at about fifteen minutes of four.

He gazed enviously at the boat and the figure of Tom Sheridan outside the pilot-house, for he knew well enough now that the "beggar" was running the line.

It was as much a mystery to him as it was to his father how Tom had secured such a fine opening for his talents; not that Ezra was willing to admit that Tom had any ability at all.

He was far too prejudiced against Sheridan to acknowledge what everybody else admitted that Tom was an uncommonly smart boy.

As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, Tom was demonstrating by his actions what was really in him.

"The idea of him, a poor boy, being made manager of a steamboat line," he muttered, discontentedly, for neither he nor his father had the remotest idea that Tom was really the originator and owner of the new transportation business. "I don't see how he came to get the job. However, he's bound to run it into the ground in no time at all—that's some satisfaction, and then a man will be put in his place. My father must have been awful slow not to get the landing established at his wharf. Then I could have been the agent here, like Bob Pennington is now. Of course, he got it because the company took his father's wharf. He's bound to put on airs now, and try to lord it over me and the rest of the fellows. I s'pose he thinks he looks awfully big in that new cap with the gold letters on the band. He makes me sick."

The steamboat having passed out of view by this time, Ezra kicked a piece of wood into the river to relieve his feelings, and then sauntered back to the house, feeling as if he'd like to punch Bob's head because he was so fortunate.

The sudden cessation of shipments from the Ivanhoe, Kenilworth and Robinson farms, as well as the knowledge that a steamboat had been put on the branch to carry freight from Liberty to Cherryville, caused the freight agent of the A. & T. Railroad to sit up and take notice.

He lost no time sending a representative to call on Messrs. Brown, Jones and Robinson to see what was the matter.

The company's man found out what was the matter, all right—that the shippers objected to paying the new freight rate, first of all, and that they found the short haul to Pennington Landing much more convenient and profitable to them than the long one to the station beyond Liberty.

The result was that the agent notified the owners of the farms in question that he would grant them a rebate on the new schedule that would bring the rate below even the old one.

The three shippers replied that they had signed a contract with the steamboat manager for a year, and they could not make a change within that time as long as the terms of the agreement was kept by the transportation company.



Tom, in the meantime, called on all the farmers who had anything to send to market, and solicited their custom, pointing out that Cherryville and Riverport, five miles further down, were good marts for the sale of their products.

As he offered satisfactory rates, he picked up a good bit of custom in this way, and the company's books at the end of the first month showed good results.

The business was paying from the very start, and Elsie congratulated Tom on the excellent showing that he was making.

Bob was pulling through in great shape, and was holding his end up without any trouble.

Tom went to Cherryville two and three times a week, and he never failed to call on Elsie, not alone to talk business with her, but also for the pleasure of meeting her.

The young people showed an increasing partiality for each other's company as time passed, and neither was quite so happy as when they were together.

Mr. French's house had been practically rebuilt since the fire, and it was there that the girl received the young steamboat lad, whom she was proud to call her partner.

He always stayed to one meal, sometimes two, and was a great favorite with Mr. and Mrs. French, who felt they never could do too much for the boy who had saved the life of their only daughter.

In this way two months and a half passed away and Tom found that his business was panning out better and better each week.

One July afternoon both Tom and Bob went to Cherryville on the five o'clock boat.

This was the trip they carried the bulk of the day's freight on the steamboat.

Tom had business with the Navigation Company's agent and did not go to the French residence.

In fact, he had barely time in which to do his business, as the boat only remained one hour in Cherryville, as she was due back at Liberty at ten.

It had been a very hot day, and soon after the Elsie French made fast to her berth at Cherryville, which she reached at seven, there were indications in the sky of an approaching thunderstorm.

As the time drew near for her to leave, the heavens were almost covered by the storm clouds.

From the brilliancy of the lightning and the loudness of the thunder, as the electric clouds came charging over the town, the storm promised to be a corker while it lasted.

Five minutes before starting-time Tom was surprised to see Mr. French step on board the steamer, accompanied by a well-dressed man, who was a stranger to him.

"Tom," said Mr. French, "this is Mr. Parker. He is the cashier of the Cherryville Bank."

Tom bowed to the gentleman, and then Mr. French continued:

"Mr. Parker wishes to send the sum of \$15,000 in gold to the Liberty Bank, and I have assured him that you will take charge of it and deliver it in safety, so that there will be no occasion for him to send a special messenger with it. I will, of course, be responsible for the money, so I shall expect you to take unusual care of it."

"I shall certainly do that, sir," replied Tom, who appreciated the responsibility about to devolve upon him.

"Both Bob and I will keep the money in sight until we deliver it to the cashier of the Liberty Bank."

"The gold is at the agent's office in charge of a messenger," said Mr. Parker. "I will have it sent aboard at once. Where shall you put it?"

"There is a little office on the cabin deck. I shall keep it there, and Bob Pennington or myself will stand guard over it all the way up the branch."

"When do you start?"

"Just as soon as your messenger brings the money aboard."

"You're going to have a rough trip, at least part of the way, Mr. Sheridan," remarked the cashier of the Cherryville Bank, as a terrific clap of thunder sounded almost immediately overhead and the sky was lit up by a vivid flash of lightning.

"Looks like it," answered Tom, as they stepped ashore on to the wharf. "I will wait here at the gangplank for your messenger."

In a few minutes the messenger appeared, bearing a heavy box on his shoulder.

"It is already receipted for," he said, delivering it to Tom.

"All right," replied the young steamboat magnate. "Cast off, Captain Ford," to the pilot, who was waiting for orders. "Follow me, Bob," he said to Pennington.

As the steamboat swung away from the wharf, amid the crashing of the elements, the two boys walked up the brass-bound stairs to the cabin floor.

No one had noticed in the darkness that two men had sneaked aboard the steamer, forward, and crouched down under the tarpaulins that protected some cases of freight billed for Liberty.

But such was the fact, and they were there for no good purpose.

"This is the most valuable freight we've carried yet," said Tom, as he opened the door of the small room that the pilot used as a storeroom and office.

"I should think it is," replied Bob. "While I don't believe there is much danger of our being relieved of it, as nobody but Mr. French, the bank cashier and his messenger knows that a box of money is aboard, one of us, as you told Mr. Parker, must keep a constant watch over it."

"You can bet your life on that. I'm not taking any chances with it. If I lost it I'd lose my reputation with it and then I might just as well throw up my hands. The pilot has a revolver. I'm going to borrow it."

Tom locked the door on the box of gold and put the key in his pocket.

"You sit down here and watch that door, Bob, while I get the gun," he said to his companion.

Bob took the seat and Tom went up to the pilot-house. He was back in a very few minutes with the pilot's revolver in his pocket.

Then he took his seat beside Bob, and one or the other of them had his eyes on the door all the time.

The fierce wind that accompanied the thunderstorm swooped down on the little steamboat, and she rocked about as if at the mercy of a heavy sea.

The thunder roared overhead at frequent intervals, and the lightning flashed almost incessantly.

"We're catching it hot, Tom," said Bob, as the uproar



of nature interfered with their conversation to a considerable extent.

"That's right, we are. This is the biggest storm of the summer."

"It's a corker and no mistake. Just listen to the wind! One might easily fancy that he was out at sea."

"Some people could get seasick on this boat the way she rocks," replied Bob.

"I guess you're right. I'm glad that I've no women passengers."

The storm continued at its height for perhaps twenty minutes, during which the rain came down in a perfect deluge.

The boys could hear it thundering upon the deck above their heads.

Then the worst of it passed away to the northwest, but the darkness remained intense, not a star being visible in the sky.

The pilot had to feel his way up the branch, and watch out sharp that he didn't get the boat aground at any of the turns in the stream, of which there were several.

The result was that the steamer reached Pennington Landing an hour late.

"You'll have to go on with me to Liberty to-night, Bob, on account of the money," said Tom.

"All right, old man, I'm with you. I'll have to open up the freight shed so the men can put those empty crates inside. I'll tell Mr. Ford to wait for me."

"You'll find me here when you get back," answered Tom. So Bob hurried away to attend to business while Tom remained on guard.

"I guess I'll take a look at that box to satisfy myself that it's all right," said Tom to himself while the boat was lying at the wharf. "Of course it is, for we've been on the watch continuously since the box come into my possession; but there is no harm in taking a look. A fellow feels nervous when he has such a big responsibility on his shoulders."

Tom took the key from his pocket, unlocked the door and looked into the little room.

It was very dark, so he struck a match and flashed it around.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "Where is the box?"

It was clearly not where he had placed it.

He was about to look around on the floor when he noticed that the shutters of the single window were broken open and the sash swung inward.

"Great Scott! The box has been stolen!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### PURSUIT OF THE THIEVES.

Tom was completely staggered by the loss of the box of money.

How any one could have known that the box was in that little room, and how the window could have been forced without he or Bob hearing the noise, was a mystery to him.

Tom went to the opening of the window and looked out. Only a narrow six-inch projecting plank extended along the side of the boat under the window.

It seemed impossible that one man could have entered the room and got the heavy box out of the window with

any success at all unless he had provided himself with a rope to lower it to the narrow space of deck below, between the railing and the side of the steamer.

He must have had an accomplice.

The job was evidently done some time during the thunderstorm, when the roar of the elements deadened the noise of breaking in the window, which an experienced eye would have seen had been accomplished with a jimmy.

Probably the work was put through during the tail end of the storm, when the lightning was less frequent and dazzling, and the darkness was intense enough to cover the moments of the thieves.

But who were the thieves?

Were two or more of the deckhands implicated in the robbery?"

"One of them might have overheard the conversation between Mr. French and me at the head of the gangway at Cherryville, and put up the job with the help of a pal," argued Tom. "In which even they have hidden the box in the hold, with the purpose of smuggling it ashore at Liberty. Unless a better clew is forthcoming, implicating somebody else, Bob and Mr. Ford will have to maintain a close watch on the hands when the boat reaches her wharf, while I get a posse of officers to come down and search the steamer from stem to stern. This is simply a terrible misfortune. I was a fool not to leave the door wide open so that Bob and I could keep our eyes on the box continually. What will Mr. French think of me? And how will I ever be able to refund the loss? I must tell Bob at once."

As he was about to leave the window he cast his eyes toward the stern of the steamer.

There in the gloom he saw the indistinct forms of two men.

All the hands were busily engaged in putting ashore the crates and wheeling them into the barn, so these men could not belong to the boat.

Tom had only brought up one passenger, who he had just noticed reading a paper in the cabin.

Who, then, could these men be?

One of them stepped across on to the stringpiece of the wharf.

The other stood against the rail apparently holding something in his arms.

The man on the dock reached out his arms and the other handed him something that seemed to be quite heavy.

As soon as he got it in his arms he started off in the gloom, followed by the other who had immediately sprung on the wharf.

"Those are the thieves!" palpitated Tom. "Whoever they be they are certainly the men who have stolen the gold and are now carrying it away under cover of the gloom. I haven't a moment to lose if I hope to recover the money. I must follow them and shoot them both if they refuse to give up the box. They won't be able to go very fast with that load, but the trouble will be to track them across the farm in the darkness. They will probably make for the woods yonder first, and then the road, hoping that the robbery may not be discovered until the steamer reaches Liberty. That would give them a good start and plenty of time to arrange their future movements. It's mighty



lucky that I looked out this window at the critical moment."

Tom rushed out of the little room, flew down the stairs and dashed on to the wharf.

He found Bob just locking the shed door.

"What's the matter, Tom? You look excited," he said, rather surprised that his companion had deserted his post before the door of the room in which he supposed the box of money still lay.

"Come with me at once. The money-box has been stolen and we must recover it."

"Stolen!" gasped Bob, in utter amazement. "You can't mean that?"

"I do mean it. We haven't a moment to lose."

"Why, how——"

"Don't ask any questions now. Wait here till I tell Mr. Ford to go ahead."

The pilot-captain was standing near the wheel-house, waiting for Bob's signal, and two hands held the gangplank partly drawn in, while a man stood forward and another aft, ready to cast off the ropes.

"All right, cap'n," said Tom. "Go ahead. Bob and I are not going any further."

Mr. Ford at once gave orders to cast off from the wharf, and the steamboat was soon sailing along her final stretch.

"Come, Bob, follow me!" said Tom, starting off toward the line of woods, as fast as he could go, followed by the greatly bewildered Bob.

Inside of ten minutes they reached the outskirts of the woods.

"Keep your eyes skinned for two men, one of them carrying the box," said Tom, hurriedly.

They stood and listened intently, but no sound met their ears except the distant peals of thunder and the rustling of the trees in the night wind.

Finally Tom, satisfied that the two men had already entered the wood, if he had calculated their line of retreat aright, led the way in among the trees.

Tom carried a heavy heart, for unless he was able to recover the gold he dreaded the interview he would have to hold with Mr. French over the 'phone in the morning.

The president of the Navigation Company would, of course, make the bank's loss good at once, but the theft would be sure to leak out, and it was bound to hurt the reputation of the new line as a trustworthy public carrier of valuable property.

Tom set great store by the success of the transportation company he had established, and it certainly was hard luck to have such a terrible thing happen during the first three months especially.

"What will Elsie think of me?" he muttered, between his teeth.

To lose her good opinion he felt would almost break his heart.

He not only admired the fair girl, but was beginning to entertain a very strong feeling of regard for her, which every meeting between them deepened.

The very fact that he had been instrumental in saving her life made his growing attachment for her warmer.

She would not, of course, withdraw her friendship from him because of his misfortune in losing the box of gold, but

he was afraid it would raise an indefinable barrier between them that might never be wholly done away with.

He suffered acutely, but determined to be a man in his resolution to recover the lost money, and not give way to despair at the prospect he saw ahead of him if failure ultimately rewarded his very best efforts.

"They may have gone towards that old hut on our property, which covers a kind of cellar where we once stored our crop of ice," said Bob, as they approached the other side of the woods.

"True, they might. But as they are probably strangers in this neighborhood they will hardly strike it except by accident."

"You are sure they are strangers, then?"

"No, I am not sure of it. I could not tell who they were in the darkness."

"It's funny, but I only noticed that we had one passenger up to-night."

"That was my idea, too. They certainly did not come into the cabin at any time or we would have noticed them."

"They must have stayed below on the freight deck, in which case some of the deckhands certainly saw them there, and Mr. Ford must have taken their tickets, so that if we fail to overhaul them we will be able to get their description to furnish to the police of all the towns around. What mystifies me is how they got into that room and got away with so heavy a box right under our noses. They certainly did not enter by the door, I can swear to that."

"No, they broke in through the window on the outside of the boat."

"They did!" cried Bob. "They must have been mighty spry rascals to do that. They had to climb up on a six-inch foot-piece and hold on by the skin of their teeth while they were forcing the shutters and the window inside. It's a wonder we didn't hear the noise they must have made."

"They worked during the thunderstorm, which made uproar enough to drown any ordinary noise."

"But I don't see how they could accomplish it in the pelting rain, with the boat wobbling like she did. Then the wind blew hard enough I should think to blow them overboard. They must have been regular gymnasts."

"They were certainly professional crooks, for only an adept in that kind of business could have accomplished, successfully, what they did."

By this time they were drawing near the ice-house.

Suddenly, through one of the cracks of the building, they saw a flash of light as if a match had been struck.

From the intermittent way the blaze came and went, the boys judged that some one was lighting his pipe.

"I'll bet that's them now," whispered Bob, excitedly.

"It's lucky I got the pilot's revolver," returned Tom, as they crept cautiously up to the entrance of the hut. "I'm going to have that gold back," he added in a determined tone, "if I have to shoot both of them to get it."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### RECOVERY OF THE BOX OF MONEY AND CAPTURE OF THE THIEVES.

Lying close to the ground in the wet grass the boys heard two men talking inside the hut.



The tones of one of them was somewhat familiar to Tom, and he wondered where he had heard it before.

He soon found out all about it, and the discovery was not a pleasant one.

The men were smoking and talking.

"Fifteen thousand dollars in gold is a pretty tough load for a man to carry, Bagley," said one of the pair, and at the mention of the name Tom gripped Bob by the arm.

His late aunt's husband was one of the thieves, and the other was probably the fellow Tom met in Bagley's company at the kitchen doorway of the French house at the time of the fire.

"It is a heavy load, Johnson," replied Bagley; "but I don't mind how tough it is to carry if we only get away with it."

"We'll get away with it all right, don't you fret," answered his companion, in a confident tone. "They haven't more than discovered its loss by this time; that will give us time enough to reach the Crossings, where you are known. We'll hire a room for the night, like any respectable person. Then we'll break open the box, divide the swag and make a bundle apiece of our shares. That will make it easy to carry. We will then let ourselves out of the house by the window of the room, make for Stanton and catch the through freight for Toledo, that gets there at four. We ought to reach the city by eight o'clock at the outside. Then we can take a boat for Buffalo, and a train from there to New York. Once in the metropolis we'll enjoy real life, and \$7,500 apiece will go a long way toward the article."

"The telegraph may head us off at Toledo," ventured Bagley.

"I hardly think it will bring detectives to the A. & T. freight yards. If we think it best, we can drop off outside the city limits and walk to the steamboat dock by a roundabout way."

"I leave the matter to you, Johnson. You know the ropes better than me."

"Yes, I guess I know a thing or two about hoodwinking the sleuths. This won't be the first time I've done it. This has been a mighty good haul for us, Bagley, and unexpected at that. Your nephew nearly got us pinched that day in Cherryville. This is where we've got back at him for it. He'll get into all kinds of trouble over the loss of this money."

"Serves him right, the cantankerous little monkey! I hate him. I don't see how he got his job on the steamboat."

"He's liable to lose it after to-night," chuckled Johnson.

Bagley made no reply to that, and for a little while the men smoked in silence.

"It's time we were startin' on, pard," said Johnson at last, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "It's your turn to act as pack mule."

"How far d'ye expect me to carry it? Remember, I ain't as strong as you," said Bagley, with a growl.

"Well, lug it as far as the road, and I'll relieve you for a spell."

The boys heard the men get up inside, and they prepared for action.

"You tackle Bagley," whispered Tom. "He's got the

box and will be at a disadvantage. Slug him good and hard. I'll hold Johnson up with my gun."

Johnson came out first, and then Bagley followed, with the box on his shoulder.

"Hold!" cried Tom, aiming his revolver at Johnson, who started back with a deep imprecation.

Biff!

Bob's hard fist landed on Bagley's nose, and box and rascal went to the ground together.

Then the sturdy young agent jumped on Bagley's chest and pinned him where he lay.

"What in thunder does this mean?" roared Johnson.

"It means that you chaps are our prisoners," replied Tom, resolutely.

"Your prisoners!" sneered Johnson. "I guess not."

He ran his right hand to his hip-pocket and Tom, believing that he was about to draw a weapon, fired at his arm.

Johnson uttered a scream of pain, and a succession of groans, as his arm fell, useless, by his side.

With a terrible string of profanity, he made a dash at Tom, raising his left arm to strike him.

The boy stepped aside and the man fell over some creeping vines and lay there, groaning with anguish.

Tom turned his revolver on Bagley, who was putting up a strong fight with Bob, in an effort to upset him.

"Surrender, Mr. Bagley, or I may treat you to a dose of the same medicine I just handed out to your side partner."

Practically that was a bluff, as Tom had no intention of shooting Bagley.

However, his resolute demeanor and stern words had the requisite effect.

Mr. Bagley was a coward when he saw a gun in front of him, and he threw up his hands, yielding sullenly enough.

"Tie his hands behind his back with your handkerchief, Bob. The company will present you with a new one."

So Bob tied Bagley's wrists together and then told him to get up.

"See that he doesn't get away, Bob," said Tom, turning his attention to Johnson, who was evidently suffering so much that all the spirit was taken out of him. "Get up, Johnson. I'm sorry I had to shoot, but you were going to draw that revolver on me that I see sticking out of your pocket, and self-preservation is the first law of nature. Get on your feet and I'll take you to a doctor."

Tom reached down, took possession of Johnson's weapon and handed it to Bob.

Bagley's companion got up, with many groans.

Tom then shouldered the money-box and ordered the men to march.

They were taken directly to Mr. Pennington's house, and Johnson was permitted to lie on the lounge in the sitting-room.

Tom went to the telephone and rang up the solitary night operator in the Liberty telephone office.

He first asked to be connected with Dr. Kent.

When he got the physician on the wire he told him he wanted him to come out to the Pennington farm to set a man's arm, which had been broken by a revolver shot.



He then got put in connection with the village head officer.

He told him to come out in his wagon and take charge of two crooks whom he and Bob Pennington had captured red-handed.

Inside of twenty minutes the doctor drove up, and was soon attending the wounded man.

By the time he was through the officer appeared.

The prisoners were loaded on the wagon, and so was the box of money, which would have to be used in evidence against the rascals.

Tom went along, as he had to go back to Liberty anyway, for he had a room there.

Bagley and Johnson were put in the lock-up, while the money was carried to the bank and delivered to the night watchman for security's sake.

Then Tom went home, after promising to be on hand at the magistrate's office next morning to press the charge of robbery against the two prisoners.

He was a happy boy again, for he had recovered the \$15,000.

## CHAPTER XV.

### TOM AND BOB ATTEND ELSIE FRENCH'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.

At ten o'clock the prisoners were brought into the magistrate's office by officer Wagner.

Tom was on hand to give his evidence, and Bob was there, too, to back him up.

It was a clear case against Tom Johnson and William Bagley, and the magistrate remanded them to the county jail in Carlyle for trial at the next term of the court.

Tom then rang Mr. French up on the long-distance telephone and told him the whole story.

Tom also surprised him by telling him that these were the two men who had robbed his home and caused the fire.

"Are you prepared to swear to that fact, Tom?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I am positive they are the men. One, I am sorry to say, is my late aunt's husband. But he richly deserves all that's coming to him."

"I will have them both indicted for robbery and arson, premeditated or accidental. It will stand against them while they're in prison for the stealing of the money-box, and then they'll be arrested at once and tried on that charge, which is bound to send them back for another term of years."

Elsie had congratulations for Tom also when next he came to Cherryville, and then he confessed to her how bad he had felt that night over the loss of the box.

"Well, Tom, I think you have made an excellent defence, and had you lost the money I should not have held it against you."

"You are very kind to say that, Elsie. It is a great relief to my mind to feel that I would have had at least one true friend—my little partner."

"You will always find me your true and earnest friend, Tom," she replied, in a tone that left him no excuse to doubt the sincerity of her words.

On the whole, the month of July proved a good one, financially considered, for the new company, and August was equally prosperous on the balance sheet.

It now became generally known that Tom Sheridan was practically the Transportation Company himself, which disclosure caused many persons to cease to wonder how he came to be at the head of the concern.

The girls all set their caps at him, but it didn't do them any good.

His thoughts were anchored at the French home in Cherryville, and, as far as he was concerned, there were two flukes to the anchor.

After the first of October, Tom cut out the morning trip and changed the time of the afternoon boat as follows:

"Leave Liberty at 2 P. M., arrive at Cherryville at 4 P. M.; leaving Cherryville at 5 P. M., arrive at Liberty at 2 P. M."

This was due to the closing of the fruit season, and was made after a conference with his three principal shippers, whom he invited to his office for that purpose.

About the middle of October, Elsie gave a birthday party at her home, and, of course, Tom was invited.

She would as soon have thought of jumping into the Maumee River as to give a party and not have him as the bright particular star of the occasion.

Bob was also invited to be present, and both the boys, arrayed in their best apparel, took the two o'clock boat for Cherryville on the day in question.

Tom only knew two or three of Elsie's own set, and Bob none at all.

However, she seemed to enjoy the task of introducing them, especially Tom, and both boys were favorably received in the aristocratic social atmosphere of Cherryville's highest circles.

They had a pretty swell time of it, and enjoyed every minute.

Tom danced with Elsie so many times that some of the girls and boys got jealous, but Tom made himself so popular on the whole that no one could find fault with him.

Bob managed to pick up one little brunette beauty to whom he paid particular attention, to the great amusement of Tom and Elsie.

The supper was the event of the evening, and both boys, in common with all the young guests, did ample justice to it.

As it was too late for them to think of returning to Liberty when the party broke up, they were invited to stay all night at the French mansion.

In fact, they remained in town until five the next afternoon, when the steamboat returned up the branch.

By this time Tom Johnson and William Bagley were getting accustomed to their quarters in the State prison, where they had been sent for fifteen years apiece—their prior conviction for the Farmer Whipple attempted burglary telling against them.

Bob, having told all his friends and acquaintances what a bang-up time he and Tom had at Miss French's birthday party in Cherryville, the news naturally reached the ears of Ezra Whipple.

The result was that he persuaded his mother to allow him to have a birthday party, too.

He sent out a pile of invitations to those he thought were his friends, but he took mighty good care not to include Tom and Bob in the list.



When the girls, who were invited, found that neither Tom nor Bob, who were by long odds the most popular lads in the neighborhood, were going to be at the party, the majority of them decided to stay at home, and they did.

Most of the boys, when they learned, in one way or another, that their particular girl was not going to attend, also stayed away.

The result was that the party was something of a frost, and Ezra felt cheaper than sour apples.

Of course, Tom and Bob heard that the Whipple party had been a failure and they grinned quietly to each other, for they knew what Ezra had aimed at when he got up his party, and they were rather tickled because his scheme had missed fire.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CONCLUSION.

With the reduction of freight carried, Tom had to reduce his help some.

Three deckhands were sufficient to do all the work on the steamer.

Bob's assistant was also laid off.

On the first of December a trip up and down the branch every other day was enough to handle all the business that came Tom's way.

He was satisfied if the boat paid expenses, and sometimes it didn't do that.

Most every business has its dull spell, and the young steamboat magnate was now experiencing his.

While he had loads of time on his hands he amused himself planning for the next season.

There was a large town called Colfax, three miles west of Liberty.

It was located on the A. & T. Railroad, the station and freight sidings being on the side facing Liberty.

This was the place where Messrs. Brown, Jones and Robinson, the fruit, produce and dairy product shippers had been obliged to send their stuff for shipment by rail before Tom started his steamboat line.

Colfax was also close to the head of the Maumee Branch, but owing to the flats a mile below the town, that is, toward Liberty, no craft of any draft could pass up to its water front.

Tom, however, got an idea in his head that a channel could be dredged through the flats.

The question was, how much would the work cost, and also could the channel, if made, be kept open at small expense?

One day he went to Toledo to consult with the manager of a Lake Erie dredging and wrecking company.

This man declared he could furnish no opinion on the subject without one of his experts went over the ground and made a thorough examination.

This would cost a certain amount of money and might yield unpromising results, after all.

Tom returned to Cherryville and laid the matter before Mr. French.

"It would mean a whole lot to me if I could get my boat through to Colfax. Would you advise me to undertake the expense of a survey?"

"Tom," replied Mr. French, "I would rather you'd use

your own judgment in this matter. It is ever so much better for a boy or man to rely on himself, as a rule, for it brings out any latent energies he may possess, and vastly strengthens his grip on the strenuous conditions of life."

Tom went home and thought the matter over, with the result that he ordered the Toledo company to make the survey and submit an estimate if the project was practicable.

The survey was duly made, and the manager of the dredging company notified Tom that his diver had discovered a filled-up channel through the flats.

He said that in the spring he would undertake to dredge it out for so much, and that in his opinion it could be kept clear by looking after it once a year.

Tom was delighted at the prospect and called on Elsie to consult with her about the matter.

She told him to go ahead, if he thought it best to do so.

Accordingly, at the proper time the dredging company sent its float up to the branch, and commenced operations.

The channel was opened up, and after running the Elsie French through to Colfax one day, to the great surprise of the people along the water front, Tom publicly announced that the steamboat would make regular trips between Colfax and Cherryville, via Liberty, until further notice.

He changed the name of his line to the Colfax & Cherryville Transportation Co., and removed his office to Colfax.

He inserted a standing advertisement in the town newspapers, and called personally on the more important shippers, to whom he submitted through water rates to Toledo and intermediate points.

He received encouragement enough to guarantee the complete success of his venture, and the receipts during the year were more than double what they had previously been on the original route.

The running schedule was only increased by fifteen minutes, but the carrying capacity of the Elsie French was frequently severely tested, and sometimes freight had to be refused for certain trips.

At the close of the year Tom mustered up the courage to ask Elsie if she would enter into new articles of partnership, the term of which should be for life.

Her answer was "Yes," and in the following June she changed her name to Elsie Sheridan, in the presence of a large crowd at the church she attended in Cherryville.

Tom now has two steamers on the Branch, both paying well, and has proved beyond all doubt that he is a boy who, in starting his own business, caught on.

### THE END.

Read "A CORNER IN STOCK; OR, THE WALL STREET BOY WHO WON," which will be the next number (96) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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## GOOD STORIES.

In India there is still burning a sacred fire that was lighted by the Parsees twelve centuries ago. The fire is fed with sandal and other fragrant woods, and is replenished five times a day.

"Tips? Oh, yes, we get them, but not from all our customers," said a waiter in one of the principal hotels. "The strangest I ever got? Well, it was from a man who looked prosperous, ate an expensive meal here, and after paying his bill thrust his hand into his vest pocket and handed me a cough drop. Evidently he mistook it for a coin. Another man, whose appearance led me to believe that he was a preacher, gave me a small piece of chewing tobacco. Both men were in deep thought, and probably only half aware of what they were doing. I've seen them often since, but, no, I never mentioned those tips."

"It is a great wonder to me," said an old chemist, "why more boys do not take up chemical experiments as an amusement. Why, I can do things with the common materials of every-day life which really seem to be more magical to the uninitiated than any of the wonders that are ordinarily performed by magicians on the public stage. Some of them are so simple that by carrying them out at a parlor entertainment a bright boy could achieve the reputation of a magician. Now there are those curious little bubbles of glass known variously as 'Prince Rupert's drops' and as 'Dutch ears.' Apparently they are merely little globules of glass with elongated tails made by heating a small glass rod in a flame and allowing the molten drops to fall into water. After they have cooled you may pound the thick part with a hammer or mallet, yet you cannot break them. On the other hand, if you break a little piece off their tails, or touch any part of them with a quartz crystal, they will disappear into the surrounding atmosphere quicker than snow will melt on a hot fire. To the person who doesn't know how this has happened the performance is so astonishing as to seem uncanny."

During the rush of Christmas shopping a young woman entered a store in this city and bought a smoking jacket. "Of course, you will pay the express charges on this for me?" she said, with a winning smile.

"Certainly, madam," replied the clerk. "We will pay express anywhere within one hundred miles."

"What will the express charge be to Blankville, W. Va.?" she asked.

"Never mind how much it will be," said the clerk. "Whatever it may be, the amount will be paid."

"But I want to know the cost," she persisted.

"I would have to 'phone the express company to get it. Why are you so anxious?"

"Because I am going to Blankville, and I will carry the package out there myself and deliver it. I want you to deduct from the price of it the amount you would have to pay the express company." And then with the sweetest of smiles she added: "Remember the saying of the good old woman, 'Let nothing go to waste.'"

The cost to a nation of entertaining monarchs varies according to the monarch. The cheapest sovereigns to entertain, judging from the bills Great Britain has had to pay, are the German Emperor and the King of Italy. It cost about \$5,000 to entertain each of them. The King of the Belgians costs \$20,000 a week; the late Shah cost \$100,000 a week. The expenditure on decorations, etc., is not included in these figures. When the Czar of Russia made his historic visit to France the cost to the Republic amounted to \$335,000.

Nearly every house in Japan has in the main reception room a recess containing a raised platform on which sits the familiar idol of the Dai Butsu (Buddha). If the family hold to the older faith of Shinto, there is also a statue of the goddess of mercy, Kaunon. Around these idols are arranged the swords, armor, ornaments and the ihdi, the sacred tablet which bears the name of the dead father, and the date of his death. The shrine containing the relics is made from the holy sun wood (hi-no-ki). This recess in the Japanese home is the heart of the family life, and corresponds to that niche in the mansion of ancient Rome wherein were placed the Lares and Penates.

## JOKES AND JESTS.

"I wonder how a defeated candidate feels?"

"I don't know; I have never been a defeated candidate; but I have been sea-sick."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I presume the feeling is much the same; one seems to have lost everything."

"Say," said the political reporter, "what's the first name of Hanks?"

"Nancy, you chump," answered the sporting reporter.

This precipitated an argument which it were idle to chronicle here.

Letter to a Schoolmaster—My son will be unable to attend school to-day, as he has just shaved himself for the first time.

"She thinks her husband is a deep-dyed villain."

"Why?"

"Well, she's never been able to catch him doing anything wrong."

Madly the throng pressed about the woman.

"What's the matter?" a stranger ventured to ask.

"Aw, you're green," responded a native in the patois of Manhattan; "dat's a loidy wot once knowed de sister of the valet of the guy dat's on trial fer murder."

The president had been tendered a golden pass admitting him to all baseball games.

At first he hesitated about accepting it.

"Does this carry the privilege of roasting the umpire?" he asked, with some concern.

Assured upon this point he wavered no longer.

Teacher—Children, what creature is that in ornithology which has a very long neck, has something to do with trimming big hats, does its fighting by scratching and kicking, and often gives cause to men to be afraid?

Eager Pupil—I know, teacher!

Teacher—Well, Sammy, what is it?

Sammy—An old maid!



# A DIAMOND BUTTERFLY

By Alexander Armstrong.

When Mrs. Walsingham lost the diamond butterfly which her husband had given her on the first anniversary of their wedding day she was naturally much perturbed by her loss.

For two seasons Mrs. Walsingham's butterfly had been an absorbing topic of conversation whenever pretty Mrs. Walsingham herself happened to be present, and on more than one occasion it had attracted the admiring attention of Royalty.

And now the butterfly was lost. The world—or rather such portion of it as was crowded into the Court Theater on that disastrous night—had seen the jeweled insect flashing and scintillating in Mrs. Walsingham's pretty brown hair all the time of the performance. But when husband and wife stood in the light of their own hall lamp, the former had uttered an exclamation of dismay.

The butterfly was gone!

Everything had been done that is usual in such cases. The colonel had looked carefully in the carriage, and had made a thorough examination of each separate fold of his wife's dress. Next morning he had gone off to the theater, and had himself searched the box in which they had been sitting. Then, with commendable prudence, he had cautioned his wife against speaking about her loss, even to the servants, and in the advertisement in which he offered a considerable reward for the recovery of the missing trinket, he had described it as "a jeweled insect (paste), valuable to the owner because specially designed for the Polish wife of Prince Boris Ivanitch, when she secretly sold the Ivanitch diamonds to supply her compatriots with funds for a revolutionary uprising."

The colonel was very well pleased with the wording of this advertisement, and read it aloud with a great deal of complacency to his wife.

Mrs. Walsingham was not quite so pleased as her husband. She objected to the slight put upon her cherished possession by describing it as paste, and the aristocratic flavor of its mythical history did not console her.

"Even if I do get it back," she murmured plaintively, "I shan't care to wear it if everybody imagines it is paste."

When, however, the colonel pointed out that he had referred the public in the first instance to a neighboring stationer's, and that there was nothing whatever in the advertisement to suggest to a captious world that Mrs. Walsingham's famous butterfly was in question, she was greatly impressed by her husband's cleverness.

That evening the Walsinghams did not dine out, but had a cozy *tete-a-tete* dinner at home, so as to be on the spot if any one came with news of the stolen jewel.

"Not that I am at all sanguine," said the colonel, as he thoughtfully peeled a banana. "If the thief had happened to be a stray pickpocket, we might hope to see the 'fly' again. It's more likely, though, that the vagabond who has the thing now had his eye on it for some time past."

But even as he spoke the solemn butler came softly in.

"A person to see you, sir," he announced deferentially; "he won't give his name, but he says Foster (the stationer) has sent him, and that you will know all about it."

Mrs. Walsingham gave a little start of delight, and the colonel could scarcely conceal his excitement.

"Show him in here, Bailey," he said, quickly, "it is some one we are expecting."

The butler withdrew, and in a few seconds ushered in a slight, gentlemanly-looking man, with sharp gray eyes and smooth face.

"Col. Walsingham, I believe?" began the stranger, taking with easy self-possession the chair which the colonel indicated at the far end of the table.

The colonel assented.

"You have come, I presume——"

"To give information about some lost property of yours. Precisely."

"Have you found it?" queried Mrs. Walsingham, eagerly.

"Well, that's just what I wish to ascertain," said the stranger, suavely. "My name is Sawder—Fred Sawder—late of Scotland Yard," he continued, turning to the colonel. "I'm a detective, and a few hours back I came across a piece of jewelry answering to your description."

"You don't mean to say so?" cried the colonel, excitedly. "Where did you find it?"

"Well, it's a long story," said Mr. Sawder, deliberately, "and brings in matters which are, so to speak, professional secrets at present. But there—the whole account will be in the papers to-morrow, so there's no harm in my telling you."

Both the colonel and Mrs. Walsingham waited anxiously for him to go on, and after a few seconds' pause he was graciously pleased to do so, pointedly addressing himself now to Mrs. Walsingham.

"Of course, madam, you have heard of the great Fenton Court robbery?"

Mrs. Walsingham made a motion of assent.

"Er—well—the fact is, to-day I had the good fortune to recover nearly all that stolen jewelry. I have just telegraphed to Mr. Fenton to come up and identify the things to-morrow."

"You have got back the diamonds?"

"Everything, madam, as far as we can tell."

"Tell us all about it," commanded Mrs. Walsingham, in her pretty, imperious manner, while her husband's face seconded her request.

"Oh, well, there's not much to tell, ma'am. From information received, we made this morning a raid on the house of a party called Sleepy Jim—sleepy, because he just isn't sleepy, don't you see, madam? Well, Jim was very easy and careless, and we searched and searched, and not a thing would we find, and at last we gave it up. I was the last to go, and as I went, I heard—for my ears are quick—I heard Jim give the least little bit of a sigh.

"'Come back, men,' I shouted, 'the things *are* here, and we won't be such numskulls as to go away without them. Let's have one more look round.' Then it occurred to me that Sleepy Jim had not been sitting on the table for nothing all the time we were turning his place upside down. So I just pushed him and it on one side, kicked over the square of carpet on which the table had been standing, and lo! and behold, there were plain signs that the boards had been raised pretty recently.

"We had those boards up again in a jiffy, and there in a deep hole underneath was all the Fenton Court jewelry!"

The detective paused, impressively, and looked at his two eager listeners, as though challenging their admiration.

"Well, and my wife's butterfly?" asked the colonel, inquiringly.

"I am coming to that, sir. Among the things there were several pins and brooches not included in the list supplied to us at Scotland Yard. I had seen your advertisement, and I thought one of the miscellaneous articles looked very much like your insect. So I just asked Sleepy Jim about it, and he told me that it had been brought to him by a man who had picked it up in Sloan street, and had been afraid to pawn it. Jim gave him thirty shillings for it; for he saw the diamonds were uncommon good paste, and——"

"But they are nothing of the sort," put in Mrs. Walsingham, indignantly; "that was only my husband's idea to call them paste."

"Ah! That was smart, sir, very smart. You ought to be one of us."

The colonel looked gratified.

"Won't you take a glass of wine, Mr. Sawder?" he said, pushing the decanter over to him.

"Thank you, sir, I don't mind if I do," replied Mr. Sawder, helping himself, and he required very little pressing to be induced to repeat the action several times in the course of the next hour.

As a consequence, he soon grew exceedingly communicative and entertained the colonel with the most thrilling Scotland



Yard narratives, all illustrative of the cleverness of rogues and the superior astuteness of detectives.

"It's not that the criminal classes are so especially clever," he remarked, judiciously, as he wound up one of his tales; "but the public is so uncommonly soft.

The colonel acquiesced. There was a great many fools in the world, he opined; but for his part he had no pity for them. He himself had never been taken in in his life.

"I can quite believe that," said Mr. Sawder, politely; "and if I may make so free, I repeat again you ought to be one of us."

The colonel did not at all resent Mr. Sawder's freedom. He was particularly pleased with him and his stories, and in the fullness of his heart he told him he was going down to his club for half an hour, and would be charmed to give him a lift.

Mr. Sawder was quite sensible of the colonel's condescension, and accepted the offer with effusion. Having arranged with Mrs. Walsingham that she was to come down to Scotland Yard the following morning, he went off with the colonel into the adjoining room, waiting there while this gentleman got ready to go out. This room was a sort of sanctum of Colonel Walsingham, and while he drew on his gloves he passed in review his collection of fire-arms and other objects of warlike predilection.

The detective seemed a bit of a connoisseur, and his enthusiasm was sufficiently dashed with discriminating knowledge to be particularly pleasing to the colonel, who actually deigned to bring out from a cavernous cupboard his latest extravagance; to wit, a handsome fur lined coat he had recently imported from Russia.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Think?" said the detective, "why, that it's not a thing to be left in the hall."

"Rather not," laughed the colonel, "we keep it in the cupboard in this room. Why, that coat cost me eighty guineas."

"It looks as if it had," said the detective, warmly, and the colonel being now ready, the two gentlemen got into their hansom and drove off.

It was scarcely half an hour afterward that there was a hasty pull at the door bell. Mrs. Walsingham was tired and had gone to bed, and the household had followed her example. The butler alone was still up, busy with the silver in his pantry.

"Why, master's forgotten his latch-key!" he cried, hurrying to the door; "it's lucky for me he's come back so early."

But it was not Col. Walsingham who stood in the doorway—it was Mr. Sawder.

"Sorry to trouble you, my man," he said, speaking very fast, and slipping a shilling into Bailey's hand; "but I left some most important papers behind me, which I was showing to Colonel and Mrs. Walsingham. Will you give them to me?"

"Papers, sir! I haven't seen any."

"But they must be here," cried Mr. Sawder, looking very worried. "The fact is—I dare say Mrs. Walsingham told you—those papers have to do with the Fenton Court robbery. We nabbed the man and the swag this afternoon, and the owner's coming up to-morrow. So you see the papers are awfully important."

"Of course, they must be," said the butler, unbending his solemn dignity on the instant. "Well, I'll just light a taper and see if they are anywhere in the dining-room. I may have overlooked them, but I don't think I have."

The detective followed him into the dining room and helped in the search, but no papers were to be found, and he grew more and more anxious.

"I tell you what it is," he began in a vexed tone, "Mrs. Walsingham must have noticed them directly we had gone, and, knowing their importance, must have locked them up somewhere. Now if you can get them for me to-night I'll not forget you."

Bailey's kindness, or his affection for the prospective coin, made him consent, after a little demur to do what he could.

"I'll go upstairs and call up one of the women servants," he said, "and then send her to ask Mrs. Walsingham. I'll shout

up to the under housemaid," he added; "she'll come like winking when she hears my voice."

It took longer to get the housemaid to come down, however, than the butler had anticipated, but at last she had gone off on her embassy, and had brought her mistress' answer to Bailey, patiently waiting on the upper landing.

"I'm sorry, sir," he began, as he descended the last flight of stairs, "but Mrs. Walsingham hasn't seen your papers."

Then he stopped short. The rosy tints fled from his well-nourished face, and a bilious hue took possession of that broad expanse.

The street door was open, and Mr. Sawder had disappeared. "A 'do,'" murmured Bailey, faintly; "a real old 'do.'"

He thought of his plate, and almost breathed again as he remembered that he had deposited it in the plate-chest and turned the key before he had let the insidious stranger in.

"Depend upon it, he's only gone off with master's umbrella," he said, trying to reassure himself.

The next moment he struck his hands wildly together, and rushed into the colonel's study.

When he came back he was perfectly green. The colonel's fur coat, for which he had paid eighty guineas only a few weeks back, was nowhere to be found!

The officials of Scotland Yard next morning listened with polite attention to Col. Walsingham's account of what had happened.

"A clean-shaven man, with gray eyes, you say?"

"Yes," was the answer. "He gave the name of Sawder—Fred Sawder."

"Fred Sawder! The man was James Croft, alias Sleepy Jim, the cleverest rogue in the United Kingdom, and as slippery as an eel. I am afraid you will never see your coat again, sir."

And he was right, for the colonel never did. But one result of his little experience was that he completely changed his views of criminals.

"It is not that the public is so stupid," he was often heard to say; "it is those scamps who are so horribly clever."

President Roosevelt was the second man elected to the highest office within the gift of the nation while wearing a moustache. The first was Grover Cleveland.

According to a census taken about two years ago, St. Petersburg has a population of something over 1,500,000, and of these one-third are unable to read and write.

The coin of smallest denomination ever made by this country was the half-cent piece. It also enjoyed the distinction of being the first coin issued, and the first retired from circulation.

One of Alaska's pioneer farmers is J. D. Johnston, of Bear Lake, near Seward, who has taken up a homestead and is putting it under cultivation. After two years' work he can show a comfortable, well-built home, a dozen acres ploughed, thirty acres seeded down for pasture and a considerable part of his claim cleared. He is successfully growing clover, and has planted many varieties of fruit trees, berry bushes and flowers, most of which are thriving. He reports that he finds much profit on Plymouth Rock chickens. Last year he hatched and raised 168 chickens, besides selling eggs to the value of \$20 a month. He estimates that each hen has cleared \$4 above the cost of henfeed. He also keeps cows, and sells their milk at a profit. Mr. Johnston has proved that farming in Alaska is both practical and profitable.

About the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a change in the "rule of the road" in England, and carriages were supposed to go to the left. In order to remain mindful of the new regulation drivers were in the habit of repeating the following quatrain:

"The rule of the road is a paradox quite:

In driving your carriage along,

If you go to the left, you are sure to go right;

If you go to the right, you are wrong."



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